

Memories of My Life and Times

Bipin Chandra Pal

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FOREWORD



The individual is not an isolated unit, but is part of a whole, composed of many other individuals. This whole is called *society*. The relation between the individual and the social whole of which he is a part is an organic relation. It means that the individual can fulfil himself only in and through *society*, even as this *society* can fulfil its collective life only in and through the fulfilment of the individual ends of the numerous *humans* composing it. The individual and the *society* to which he belongs are, thus, inter-dependent upon one another for their self-fulfilment.

And the things that differentiate *Man* from the rest of the creation, so far as we know it—his *reason*, his emotions, his will, his power of knowing himself and his capacity for love and self-sacrifice—all these are evolved in and through his social life and relations. The individual finds his highest self-expression and self-realisation in and through his *society* even as his *society* finds its highest expression and realisation in and through the life and activities of the individuals composing it. The individual and his *society* are like the warp and woof of the social fabric. To truly understand the individual, we must see him in and through his social setting; and to correctly appraise social values, we must see *society* in and through the life and aspirations, the struggles and achievements, of its individual human units.

The value of the life-story of any individual consists, therefore, not in it itself, however great or noble that life may be, but only

as a revelation, an explanation and interpretation of the hidden currents of social history and evolution that, entering into it, shapes and moulds it to its universal end. That end is the 'education of the race'. In this view, biographies of individuals become both the texts and the commentaries of universal social revelations. The real value of the life-story of any individual is from this point of view, not in itself, but in the elucidation of social life and movements that play around that life.

At one time, history was believed to be nothing more or less than the biographies of the great men that stood on the top-wave of the social movements of their time. That was the view of the old individualism. The organic conception of both individual and social life and evolution had not been fully grasped as yet.

But we now know that though every human is, in himself, a measure of absolute values, these values are discovered not in the life of the individual considered apart from the general life of the society about him, but always in and through his social environments. The thief, the murderer, the 'vilest vermin among humans', men and women who know and understand nothing more than what their primitive instincts and passions reveal, and who really do not understand even their own impulses and movements—all these do not stand by themselves, but are warps and woofs of their social life. No one who does not understand the nature and trend of the society to which these 'waifs and strays' belong can really understand these 'derelicts of humanity'. The modern Science of Society or Sociology, has, therefore, called into being modern realism in literature. The true object of this realism is not to paint the prurient vices of individual life and character in living colours, but really to bring out the universal elements of goodness in our common humanity from underneath the accumulated debris of social tyranny and injustice which are the real parents of all our personal sins and crimes. Society is reflected in the life of the individual even as the individual, reacting upon his social environments, contributes to its growth or decay, as the case may be.

The life of an individual, however humble it may be, and howmuchsoever mean may be its value if taken in itself, is,

therefore, found to have a worth far transcending its outer qualities, when studied as an expression and illustration of the general social movements about him. From this viewpoint every biography is a social history, and challenges the attention of all those who desire to study and understand the times of that individual.

The following pages are written in this view only. The personal history is meant only to furnish a concrete and realistic background of the unseen and oftentimes unappreciated trends and tendencies of his times.

The period covered by these seventy-two years, 1860-1932, reveals a most important epoch of modern Indian history. These seventy-two years have seen mighty transformations in Indian thought and society. The social life of seventy-two years ago cannot even be conjectured from that of today. The social standards, as well as the mental and moral outlook of the present generation of Indians, even in far distant rural areas among unlettered peasants, have little similarity with those of their fathers and grandfathers. These seventy-two years have seen first a violent religious and social revolt, and then a tremendous political upheaval which would stagger our grandfathers, if not indeed even our fathers, if they could come back to life today.

And the writer of these memories has had the proud privilege of witnessing, and indeed personally sharing, more or less in his own humble way, the toils and turmoils through which these mighty transformations in Indian thought and life have taken place. And he has tried to use the thread of his personal life only to weave together the history of his times, and not present that life as something of any value in itself to the world. He does not hold his personal life to be in any way different from the personal life of thousand of his contemporaries, any one of which might, more or less, furnish as good, if not perhaps in some cases a much better, structure for sizing and warping the history of these seventy-two years.

Kalighat, Calcutta
May 15, 1932

(The author died 5 days later, on May 20, 1932 in the morning.)

The facsimile of a letter Sri Bipin Chandra Pal in Bengali written to a daughter-in-law of his, dated July 26, 1928, from Dacca, now in Bangladesh, on a cultural lecturing tour on the ideals of the Brahma Samaj as part of the movement of renaissance in Bengal and India is printed at the back. After his stay in Dacca he would be going to Mymensingh, he said. Dacca was the intellectual capital of Eastern Bengal, as it was called then, with an emphasis on Islamic culture, which itself was a part of the composite culture of mediaveval and modern Bengal.

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INTRODUCTION



I

In the later part of the eighteenth century the impact of the European civilization was being felt among the small number of English educated Indians. This was of great significance because after a century of anarchy and stagnation, Western ideas created awareness in the minds of educated Indians. The impact was intense because Aurangzeb was averse to new ideas and outlook. Even the Marathas who rose in protest to Aurangzeb were not receptive and open to new liberal outlook that the Western impact created. Its major social achievement was merely limited to providing equal treatment to the Hindus and the Muslims. According to Jadunath Sarkar (1973), a major reason for the failure of the Marathas was their inability for innovations or, for that matter, their failure to create new political ideas. In other words, unlike in Europe, in India, an acute crisis did not lead to innovative political theory. It was not a period similar to fifth century BC, that of Plato and Aristotle, or a period of seventeenth century AD, that of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. These were two important periods of European history reflecting acute crises and transition resulting in far-reaching social, economic and political changes with political theory mirroring and responding to these challenges (Sabine 1939: 16).

In this anarchic situation that existed in India, the Europeans started consolidating their control. Amongst the European powers, England ultimately proved to be the winner. From the death of Aurangzeb in 1707 to the victory of the British army in Bengal in 1757, the period was very gloomy in Indian history. The decline of the Mughal Empire meant loss of political unity resulting in

confusion and disorder. This sordid state of affairs was graphically described by the French traveller Jean Law in 1759: "I have travelled everywhere from Bengal to Delhi; nowhere have I found anything from anyone except oppression of the poor and plundering of wayfarers" (cited in Bose 1960: 1). It was also a period when any kind of political speculation or, for that matter, any linking of nationalist aspiration was totally absent. The lack of nationalism and political consciousness were the biggest factors that helped the easy consolidation of British hegemony over India. But the British rule being administered through the East India Company, for which the commercial interest was of paramount importance, was hardly any better. Edmund Burke very aptly criticized the Company's government as "one of the most corrupt and obstructive tyrannies that probably existed in the world" (cited in Bose: 2). The colonial rulers were not interested in promoting Western education in the country. The first Governor General, Warren Hastings, took the initiative of setting up Muslim or Hindu centres for studying indigenous traditions, largely because of his knowledge of many Indian languages. The net result of this was that both the communities were immersed in the rediscovery of their respective traditional heritage.

Describing this period, Tagore commented:

India was in a death-like sleep in which her life was dried up, and it showed all those dead and forgotten customs, superstitions and prejudices, all ignorance and fear, all feuds, all bitterness and separateness, all unreasonableness and remotelessness from the wide world (cited Bose *ibid*: 6).

Even the traditional learning had decayed and the entire educational edifice was based on a very narrow foundation. The study of the Sanskrit language, ancient classics and sacred texts was virtually given up. There were no centres of higher learning with the exception of the *tols*, *maktabs* and *pathshalas*, which imparted only rudimentary Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic languages along with simple mathematics sufficient for conducting one's ordinary life. In Bengal, the Bengali prose was still in its formative stage.

This twin lack of education and political authority created a situation of social degeneration. A reflection of this was the widespread practice of blind superstitions and brutal killing of female children, throwing the first child in the holy river, inhuman atrocities on the lower castes by the higher castes, leading to a feeling of helplessness and extreme insecurity. It is a fact that some of these practices existed for a long time. But whereas in earlier times these practices were rather uncommon, they became rampant now. The worst sufferers were women. The reflection of this degeneration was amply demonstrated by the socio-religious practices at the time of Rammohun Roy. Sacrificial rites, outward show, lavishness and exhibitionism in religious festivals were common. "Superstition and irrational orthodoxy had taken the place of reasoning" (Bose *ibid*: 7).

Beginning of a New Era: India's Response to the British Rule

Towards the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth century, the situation started to change for the better. In generating this new awareness, which is often termed as the beginning of nineteenth century Indian Renaissance, the establishment of the Asiatic Society in Bengal (1784) was a very important milestone. A group of English scholars, the most important of whom was William Jones, enthusiastically started dissecting the ancient Sanskrit literature and out of this serious research, the twenty volumes of *Asiatic Researches* emerged, providing a lot of interesting and stimulating facts of Oriental and Indian civilizations. These were unknown even to the then educated Indians.

Apart from opening the door to Western appreciation of Indian culture, Sir William Jones's work had very remarkable effects on India itself. To a people who had sunk so low as the people of Bengal had in the eighteenth century, the work of Jones and his orientalist came as a balm. The national self-esteem of India which had touched its depths at the end of the eighteenth century received its first aid to

recovery in the appreciation which Indian literature received at the hands of the most renewed men in Europe. Jones can be acclaimed in this sense as one of the fathers of the Great Recovery which followed in the nineteenth century (Pannikar 1964: 204).

The second important factor in the awareness was the introduction of Western education. This was achieved by the joint collaboration of enlightened Indians and the Christian missionaries. This brought Indians in contact with the West and Western thought. The third impact was that of the French Revolution, especially in the minds of the Indian youth. In this context, one example may help us in assessing the magnitude of this influence. The Christian missionary Alexander Duff recorded that in just one ship one thousand copies of Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason* arrived. At the beginning, the book was sold at just one rupee but because of the tremendous demand its price increased manifold within a few days. Within a short time, a cheaper edition of all works of Paine was published.

Three Different Responses to the British Rule

The net impact of all these developments dramatically changed the intellectual climate of India in general and Bengal in particular within a few decades. In this period of ferment three different schools of thought emerged. The first, influenced by the Western rationalistic outlook, was iconoclastic. It was critical of both authority and tradition and wanted total abolition of the caste restrictions and practices. Though most of them were young and did not adopt Christianity, they "renounced the whole system of Hinduism" and "there was little sympathy either between them and their countrymen or between them and the English; they had been raised out of one society without having a recognized place in another" (O'Malley 1969: 66). The leader of this radical movement was Henri Derozio (1809-31).

The second group consisted the conservative Hindus who wanted to uphold social and religious status quo. This group was led by well-to-do Hindus. Though they were spokesmen for Hindu conservatism, they were practical minded people and championed

the cause of English education, as they were shrewd enough to realize that such knowledge would be beneficial to them. But though they wanted to learn English as a language, they showed little inclination to assimilate Western thought and culture. What helped them most was the policy of the East India Company of non-interference in Indian religious rites and social practices. The most well-known of them was Radhakanta Deb (1784-1867).

The third school of thought was typified and identified with Raja Rammohun Roy (1774-1833). This group, while attempting to reform society and religion from within, was also prepared to incorporate the positive aspects of Western thought and culture. This awakening was a combination of the forces of the Renaissance with those of Reformation. There was a national, conservative side, which was reflected in the revival of India's culture and reform of Indian religion. In this respect Rammohun's role was like that of Martin Luther's in the European context. Luther appealed to the *Bible* as the authority against medieval degeneration and corruption. Rammohun similarly took his stand on the basis of the *Vedas*, the oldest Hindu scriptures in which he discovered a form of pure and undiluted Hinduism. But there was, unlike Luther, another side of Rammohun, namely his cosmopolitanism, to assimilate what was good and useful in other civilizations, cultures and religions. For instance, he was attracted by monotheism by his contact with the Muslims. He was also deeply influenced by the ethical teachings of Christianity and believed that asceticism was not essential for leading a religious life, for it could be fulfilled within social surroundings. Subhash Chandra Bose correctly pointed out that Rammohun was the first to assimilate Western scientific culture with Indian culture (1965, 1).

The Indian Renaissance was possible only because a principle was discovered by which India could throw herself into the full current of modern civilization in the outer world without totally discarding her past (Sarkar cited in Bose 1960: 9).

Rammohun became the most representative example of this Renaissance in its formative period. It is because of such a

remarkable achievement that all the important thought and movements of the nineteenth century—social, religious and political—in India rightly began with Rammohun (Majumdar 1966: 3). What Hegel is to Western thought, Rammohun is to Indian. The impact of Rammohun followed by the reforms of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and the literary works of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee created a new climate for a fresh kind of political discourse. In this transformation from the social to the political Surendranath Bannerjee played a pivotal role with the founding of the Indian Association in 1876 and subsequently in the emergence of the Indian National Congress in 1885. It is this new period of transition that is mirrored in the memoirs of Bipin Chandra Pal (1858-1932).

II

Pal was conscious of the inter-dependence between society and the individual, which is reflected in his autobiography. He looked at his attempt as a reflection of the contemporary social history beginning with the period immediately after the First War of Independence of 1857. He attributed the changes first to a violent religious and social revolt and then the beginning of a tremendous political upheaval. This unprecedented wide turmoil led to total transformation of Indian life and thought.

Pal's first lessons of democracy came in learning the ancient texts, particularly that of Chanakya's, as a young boy. The proclamation *swadesha pujeta raja bitumen sarvtra pajyata* made a deep impression in his young impressionistic mind. The supreme sacrifice of *Data Karna* also left a lasting impression. He also made an interesting observation that (p. 86) in his young days "money had little social value" and status was dependant on caste and not on money. But still "where caste considerations did not enter, as in the case of men with saintly character and reputation, it used to be regulated by what may be called moral and spiritual values" (p. 86). In an example of self-respect for the poor, he narrated an incident when a rich zamindar wanted

to treat his local guests lavishly but on their refusal to accept such ostensible delight which they could not reciprocate, the zamindar was forced to treat them as ordinarily as was the general custom those days.

He mentioned the reasons for his opposition to the Brahmo Samaj which was mainly because of its superior airs which these young reformers gave themselves (p. 102). But he was also categorical in his total loss of faith in traditional Hinduism and showed his interest in the reform initiated by Debendranath Tagore. What really stirred the young Pal in Sylhet were the murky circumstances that forced the retirement of Surendranath from the coveted Indian Civil Service. The popular perception of the dismissal was the "open hostility of the British bureaucracy towards the English educated Bengalees" (p. 116). He also pointed out that it was a mistake to think that Bengalee Hindu women did not have literacy before the British came to India (p. 123). The women belonging to the Vaishnavite denomination were well-versed in vernacular language as a part of religious discourse. This education began with the advent of Chaitanya. Another class of Bengali ladies who were educated was the upper caste Hindus of North Bengal. Unlike the Vaishnavite women, these women were educated by their parents and guardians guided by "secular motives" (p. 124). The aim of this education was to prepare these women to face "unfortunate exigencies of widowhood" (p. 124).

Pal described his father as "a confirmed fatalist like most people of his time and class" (p. 124) arguing that the calamity of widowhood was a curse and nothing could stop that calamity. Unfortunately Pal's sister became a widow within three years of her marriage when she was just 16 years of age. She also gave birth to a daughter after her husband died. It was at this time that Pal came into contact with Bengali literature, first through Vidyasagar and Akshay Kumar Dutta and then through the famous novels of Bankim. From Sylhet, Pal moved to Calcutta for higher education and grew attentive to many new things. He

ate chicken, considered to be forbidden, at a friend's house under the belief that it would give him more strength and flesh rather than the taste for it (p. 149).

The years 1875-78 were memorable as it saw the birth of a new Indian nationalism. Pal categorically wrote:

This new nationalism had its origin in a renaissance in Bengal literature brought about by our contact with European thought. The prophet of this renaissance was Bankim, whose school *Banga Darshan* did for contemporary Bengalee thought and literature what the French Encyclopedists did for eighteenth century European thought and French literature (p. 169).

With an emphasis on slow process of change, he mentioned the role of Bankim's predecessors. On such predecessor was Michael Madhusudan Dutta, who created the modern Bengali prose and who could be compared with Milton in his achievement (p. 170).

Along with this literary renaissance, the Brahmo Samaj under the inspiring leadership of Kesub Chandra Sen created a new creed of personal freedom and called for social equality, and that created a new consciousness amongst the young. Kesub's articulation and arguments with the missionaries and his subsequent successful trip to England created a new confidence in the minds of the educated Bangalis. Pal wrote: The old paralyzing sense of superiority of their new political masters over them was visibly replaced by a new self-confidence in our educated countrymen in consequence of Kesub's acts (p. 171). In 1875 after his unsuccessful attempts to get reinstated, he was invited by C.S. Vidyasagar to hold the chair of English in the Metropolitan Institution. It was here that Surendranath emerged as the most favourite leader of the Bengali youth.

With primarily a political appeal, there was a new message of freedom in him. Political liberty became the centre of his agenda.

(He) presented the Sikh movement as really a movement of freedom, first against the current ceremonialism and

Brahminical domination of the Hindu community, second, against the oppression of the Moghuls...and lastly against British aggression (p. 181).

But the most inspiring was his lectures on Joesph Mazzini and the young Italy movement. The period 1870 to 1880 also saw the emergence of a new stage. Before the advent of Surendranath and Ananda Mohan "it was the Bengali stage which had found expression to the new spirit of patriotism among our rising generation of educated intellectuals" (p. 88). Political ones asserting legitimate rights of Indians against British rulers replaced social dramas supporting widow remarriage and condemnation of polygamy. The famous *Neel Darpan* was the first political drama. The nationalistic songs also emerged. The combined effect of all these facilitated a new sense of nationalism and political awakening.

In this consolidation of new nationalism Pal also devoted considerable attention to the contribution of Nabagopal Mitra and the Hindu Mela. Nabagopal Mitra belonged to the conservative section of the Brahmo Samaj led by Debendranath Tagore in opposition to the progressive section led by Kesub. The progressive section "developed unmistakable tendencies towards the modern European and Christian ethics and rationalism" (p. 195). The conservative Raj Narain, on the contrary, proclaimed the superiority of the Hindu religions and cultural practices over European and Christian religious beliefs and cultures. It was, as Pal noted, "the first challenge of the ancient spirit of India to the aggressive thought and civilization of Europe" (p. 195). One of the prominent members of this group, Raj Narain Bose, promoted Bengali as a language of conversation and correspondence amongst the educated Bengalis and advocated indigenous clothes and other local products, excluding the use of foreign goods. It was a total notion of national freedom, inclusive of all aspects of the national life—religious, social, economic, industrial and political. Raj Narain influenced Nabagopal considerably "and the Hindu Mela which he organized early in the seventies of the last century was really the joint child

of these two early representatives of modern Indian nationalism” (p. 198).

The vernacular press was also becoming more vocal, and to curb its freedom, Lord Lytton proposed a new Press Act of 1877. Many Bengali publications stopped functioning as they refused to accept the humiliating conditions of the act. But the *Amrita Bazaar Patrika* immediately converted itself into a weekly in English and escaped the jurisdictions of the Act. There were many other unpopular measures during Lord Lytton’s governorship. In fact, the Arms Act, which prohibited the Indians from carrying arms, was resented more than the Vernacular Press Act. These repressive measures, commented Pal

...instead of reconciling the political consciousness in the country of British rule, which was certainly not difficult at that early stage, helped to create and strengthen a new anti-British feeling among our people (p. 224).

In March 1878, the very foundation of the Brahmo Samaj was shaken when Kesub decided to marry his eldest daughter with the minor Maharaja of Coah Behar. Pal joined the protest movement against this. Apart from this serious setback, Pal also mentioned the autocratic functioning of the Brahmo Samaj because of a “lack of regular democratic constitution” (p. 259). The people who broke away from Debendranath Tagore’s organization because of his autocratic functioning did not create instruments of collective democratic functioning. Kesub’s action brought all these problems to the surface, and the need for a constitution was deeply felt. Pal commented: “The makers of this constitution for the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj carefully devised checks and counter-checks to prevent the growth of any manner of autocracy in this Samaj” (p. 260). As a part of this new Brahmo movement Pal went to Cuttack to take charge as headmaster in a school in 1879. In the absence of a rail link between Calcutta and Cuttack, Pal had to reach the destination by streamer and then by boat. At that time Orissa was a part of Bengal administration. But his stay in Cuttack was short for he stayed there for just a year. After a brief interlude in his home-town in

Sylhet in August 1881, he went to Bangalore as the headmaster of another school. His stint in Bangalore was also short and by end of December 1882 he returned to Calcutta.

The 1880s were an important decade in the context of a new beginning in Indian politics. The Liberal Gladstone came back to power and for the first time the administration in India got incorporated into the policy of the Liberals in the House of Commons. During Gladstone's election campaigns, the Indian situation became an election issue and the Liberal victory raised hopes in India, which was confirmed by the appointment of Lord Ripon as the viceroy. Lord Ripon was known as a man who had courage of conviction. He initiated immediate reforms beginning by repealing Lytton's Vernacular Press Act. The Arms Act, however, continued. His reforms led to "the gradual evolution of a frankly democratic constitution in British India" (p. 308). The agitation against the Ilbert Bill consolidated the nationalist movement. Amongst the progressive legislations under Lord Ripon's viceroyalty was the Local Self-government Act. Pal took note of the criticism of Lord Ripon's Indian policy as "cunning by diplomacy rather than honest regard for India's legitimate political freedom in the modern world" (p. 316) but rejected it by the comment that anybody who knew him would not have any suspicion of mind and character. Lord Ripon was a popular viceroy and Pal had no doubt in characterizing him as one of the makers of modern India. An immediate effect of this new awakening that the viceroy had initiated was the foundation of the Indian National Congress in 1885.

Along with the changes in the political scenario, there were interesting changes in the religious and social issues, which Pal also dissected. Rationalism and individualism of the European culture dominated the early phase of the evolution of modern Bengal. However, conflict of political perception and interest created a cleavage between "the new generation of English educated Indians and the British officialdom" (p. 319) resulting in a revulsion and revolt against external domination and rejection of Western culture. This meant a defence even of those social institutions and religious and spiritual tendencies that had

previously been openly repudiated as false and harmful (p. 319). A number of factors contributed to this shift. The revival of medievalism in the Brahmo Samaj itself was one important factor. The establishment of the Theosophical Society led to a revival of Hindu religion. In Bengal, Bankim exerted a special influence. Bankim following Renan, presented a new characterization of Shree Krishna as the ideal man. But the political movement took a different shape. It assumed an all India character mainly because of the inspiring leadership of Surendranath and Ananda Mohan. The Indian Association envisaged an Indian Parliament with representation of all the parts of the subcontinent. With this idea, branches were opened even beyond Bengal.

Pal devoted a separate chapter to the second Congress Session held in Calcutta in 1886, which he attended. The first Congress was a very small affair and Bengal was not even properly represented in it. Surendranath and Ananda Mohan were deliberately left out of the first session. But realizing that it was practically impossible to mobilize without Surendranath and his associates, Hume brought them under the Congress fold. The Calcutta Congress was much bigger than the preceding Bombay one with more representatives attending it. Dadabhai Naoroji presided over it. The Congress leadership had already developed 'autocratic tendencies' (p. 392). But a friendship developed between a section of the Maharashtra leadership and Pal of Bengal, much before the *swadeshi* and boycott movements. In October 1887, Pal joined the *Tribune* at Lahore as a sub-editor but left it in August 1888. During his stint in *Tribune* he attended the third session of the Congress in Madras in which, with assistance from Justice Mahadev Ranade, Pal and his associates could make the decision-making process broader than before by convincing Hume that they were fighting for a principle and not for personalities. In 1888 the government's attitude towards the Congress became more favourable. It was seen as a forum articulating the interests of educated Indians. It was supposed to minimize popular discontent and prevent "continental insurrection or revolt" (p. 406). The third Congress at Madras in 1887 tried to broaden the base of the Congress by including the masses of

Madras Presidency. The officials did not look to this development favourably. But the top brass overruled this opposition and the Congress earned the official favour.

Another very significant development was Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's organized movement to keep the Muslims outside the ambit of the Congress. Sir Syed was not a self-seeker and had in his mind the larger interest of the entire Muslim community. As the Muslims were backward without modern education, Sir Syed feared Hindu supremacy in government and administration. With this perception he started a rival organization, the Muhammadan Educational Conference in 1886.

Pal dealt at length with the emergence of Swami Dayananda and the Arya Samaj. Dayananda visited Calcutta in 1870s but "his message found little or no response from the Bengalee Hindu community" (p. 42). In Punjab, however, it was different as in his message the people found "a powerful defensive weapon by which they could repudiate the claims of superiority of Christianity and Islam over their national religion" (p. 424). Dayananda was an instinctive reformer and vigorously pursued reform to make Hinduism adaptable to modern times. It was a combination of religious and social reform. Pal acknowledged the important work that the Arya Samaj initiated under Dayananda's inspiration. The Arya Samaj was divided between a moderate and an extremist section, but in both the "anti-foreign sentiments in the youthful adherents of the Arya Samaj were far more bitter than what we had in Bengal" (p. 432).

Regarding the agitation on the Age of Consent Bill, Pal was in favour of the bill. He mentioned his visits to England and the United States also in his *Memoirs*. He found Americans to be free from the "bondage of old ideas and traditions" (p. 550). The Americans, unlike the British, were receptive to new ideas. Their only prejudice was restricted to race. Pal was also influenced a great deal by the ideas of Shivanth Sastri and Brajendranath Seal. He summed up his political philosophy of the period in the following words:

I was a democrat, a democrat of democrats, a radical of radicals, Yet I said that neither by democracy nor my radicalism took away to the least measure from my loyalty to the British Government.

This was repeated during the Shivaji festival in Calcutta in 1902.

We are loyal, because we believe in the working of the Divine Providence in our national history, both ancient and modern, because we believe that God himself had led the British to this country to help it in working out its salvation and realize its heaven appointed destiny among the nations of the world (Pal: cited in Mukherjee and Mukherjee 1988: p. 12).

The turning point was 1903 when the proposal of division of Bengal was made. Pal's loyalty to the Raj received a severe jolt. His new India from a primary emphasis of cultural renaissance moved to the political arena. From a believer of the Raj he became a stout opponent both in his speeches and writings.

Pal's *Memoirs* reflected the impressions of a young perceptive mind of a transitional period of modern Indian evolution from the societal concerns of the early nationalists to the political ones as articulated and consolidated by the efforts of Surendranath, Ananda Mohan Bose and their associates. He was a believer in the positive intervention that the British made in India, reflecting the mood of the Indian nationalists from Rammohun to early Gandhi. He mentioned other important developments like the rise of Dayananda's Arya Samaj and the beginning of the Muslim response to Indian nationalism under Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, which also coincided with the early years of the Indian National Congress. Pal also analyses some important international events like the impact of the Crimean War in which England and France collaborated to see that Czarist Russia did not get any access to the warm waters of the Dardenelles. This was to prevent Russia from securing overseas colonies and thereby becoming a rival to Western European colonial powers. Once Russia was checkmated it was forced to expand only in Central Asia. Another very interesting observation of Pal was the relative advanced nature

of the British rule compared to earlier Hindu and Muslim period (p. 349). The major difference was that the earlier rules were personal in nature whereas the British rule initiated by the East India Company, in spite of many shortcomings, established the rule of law.

Pal accepted this major shift which was first acknowledged by Rammohun. This meant that at the least amongst the English educated mind of the late nineteenth century there was an acceptance of a forward Europe and a backward Asia and the fact that latter needed a long period of apprenticeship before aspiring for self-government. However, this sense of moderation in Pal received a severe jolt with the proposal to partition Bengal in 1903 and Pal reincarnated as an extremist, becoming the third important member of the trinity, the other two being Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Lala Lajpat Rai. The *Memoirs* unfortunately end before the manifestation of this shift but definitely remind us as to how major upheavals transform and fundamentally change political theorizing and perceptions.

III

The partition of Bengal in 1905 and the incapacity of the moderates to extract substantive concessions from the British helped in the consolidation of extremism. The external factors that contributed to the rise of extremism were the rise of Japan and her victory over Russia, the Sinn Fein movement in Ireland, the struggle for freedom in Egypt, the adoption of a constitution in Persia, the revolutionary struggles in Russia, the introduction of representative institutions in the Phillipines, the young Turk revolt and grant of self-government to Transvaal and Orange River Colony. These events created a new enthusiasm in India, which responded by clamouring for change.

Pal, an integral part of the trio—Lal, Bal and Pal—created the first major mass popular upsurge against the British Raj before the advent of Mahatma Gandhi. Pal's uniqueness and distinctiveness is reflected in a number of ways. He was the second

an association of free nations as a federal ideal. Pal returned to India in 1911 and participated in the Home Rule Movement led by Tilak and Annie Besant. In 1918 along with Tilak he participated in the International Home Rule Conference in England.

The next phase in Pal revealed his severe criticism of Gandhi's philosophy and practice of non-violent non-cooperation including the programme for boycotting councils, courts and educational institutions. He thought these would be immensely harmful for they would not yield positive response. He considered Gandhian programmes as based on magic rather than logic. He also opposed the Khilafat and cautioned against the ill effects of pan-Islamism.

In fact, Pal suffered a defeat when his amendment was rejected at the special session of the Congress held in Calcutta in September 1920 and when Gandhi emerged as the undisputed leader of the Congress and secured overwhelming support for his resolution for launching the non-cooperation movement. Pal contended that the action plan for non-cooperation be deferred and the time gained could be used for sending a delegation to England to meet the British Prime Minister to make a last-bid effort to gain self-government by negotiation and dialogue. He argued that India was reduced to a status of serfdom by the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre and the draconian Rowlatt Act of 1915. The strength of his argument elicited the support of luminaries like Chittaranjan Das, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, Madan Mohan Malaviya and Jayakar. But there was no larger support for moderation any more and Pal, who never learnt the art of compromise, became "totally isolated and alienated from the mainstream of the national movement" (Krishna 2002: 78).

Pal made a major contribution in the realm of political theory. He recognized the absence of modern vocabulary in Indian political thought and conceded that words like politics, patriotism, nation and independence were Western in origin. Hindu thought was theological in nature and the social system was deformed by the caste system. Unlike the West, where the spirit of patriotism was the link between the individual and the state, in India this link was

provided by religion. But Pal was careful to note that no religion was entirely based on renunciation as its major sustenance came from satisfying people's interests and needs. It is this later urge that led to the establishment of a modern nation. Even in India this was true, as evident from the unity of both Hindu and Muslim landlords in protecting their common interests towards the end of the Mughal Empire and Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. As such the stability of a nation is best preserved when all sections of the people find fulfilment of their desires. In the context of India, Pal pleaded for a composite patriotism which would bridge the gap between the two major communities. Towards this end he insisted on the need to organize an Akbar festival along with a Shivaji festival.

In spite of his acceptance of the Western origin of most of the modern political terminologies Pal was no blind worshipper of the West. He characterized the American and European democracies as cruel and thought that the future Indian democracy would be far better than these for it would be based on equality. He looked to imperialism from different angle than the one propounded by John Hobson and Vladimir Illyich Lenin. He felt that imperialism contributed more to unification of humanity than any other association or organization. This did not mean that he endorsed its cruelties and exploitative mechanisms for he was totally opposed to these. What he pleaded was transcendence to a larger and broader entity other than a nation. He was optimistic that in such an organization there would be equality among all nations, races and cultures with none being dominant. The sociability in human beings would eventually push towards a common bond among nations and the current trends towards globalization affirm Pal's belief. Like Gandhi, he advocated labour-intensive rather than capital-intensive technology as far as India was concerned, for that would mitigate the problem of unemployment. Like Jefferson he believed in the idea of self-sufficiency and the freedom of the village-based artisans who could combine their art with agriculture.

In 1917, Pal in association with Das and Motilal Ghose, unseated the moderates in Bengal Provincial Congress. In the

same year Pal was one of the few Indian leaders who supported the Bolshevik Revolution explaining the cause of the revolution to the lack of democratic institutions in Czarist Russia.

Pal has to be remembered for his courage, convictions and selfless devotion to the cause of India's independence and development. He was clear that the consolidation of the modern nation state in India had to be based on mutual benefit, trust and accommodation. In emphasising a pluralist basis to Indian society and polity he grasped the right path of nation-building in India. His commitment to India's composite culture was total. One very important reason for opposing Gandhi's non-cooperation movement for Pal was his rejection of pan-Islamism or any other mode of religious sectarianism. In remaining steadfast with his belief in secularism he did not even mind near oblivion from the national scene and, in spite of being in dire financial need, he showed his courage of conviction. The edifice of a modern Indian secular nation could emerge only because of the convictions of leaders like Pal for whom the commitment to larger composite nationalistic ideas was much more important than compromises and personal advancement.

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CONTENTS



<i>Foreword</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>xiii</i>

Book I

In the Days of My Youth (1858-1885)

1. Birth and Parentage	3
2. Home Influence and Early Education	10
3. School Days	19
4. Domestic Life in Sylhet during My School Days	31
5. Social Life in Sylhet during My School Days	48
6. Village Life during My School Days	70
7. Early Religious Environments and Education	88
8. Administration and Officialdom Sixty Years Ago	104
9. The Closing Years of My School Life	120
10. Student-life in Calcutta	134
11. The Birth of Our New Nationalism	169
12. The New Stage and National Songs	186
13. Nabagopal Mitra and the Hindu Mela	194

14. Political and Administrative Changes during My College Days	202
15. How I Came to the Brahmo Samaj	225
16. Father and Son	246
17. The Sadharana Brahmo Samaj	252
18. Orissa Fifty Years Ago	266
19. 'National' Education and Public Activities in Sylhet	275
20. Madras Fifty Years Ago	292
21. Lord Ripon and the New Political Awakening	307
22. Hindu Religious Revival and Social Reaction	317
23. The Triumph of Father Love	336

Book II

Memories of My Life and Times (1886-1900)

1. General Survey	349
2. In the Role of a Zemindar	383
3. Second Session of the Congress	390
4. With the <i>Tribune</i> of Lahore	393
5. Subjects Committee of the Congress	402
6. Fourth Session of the Congress	406
7. Swami Dayananda and the Arya Samaj	416
8. The Congress of 1889	433
9. Through the Shadow of Death	439
10. The Consent Bill Agitation (1890-92)	446

11. In the Service of the Brahmo Samaj	453
12. Bijaykrishna Goswami	462
13. Bijaykrishna and the Brahmo Samaj	480
14. My Initiation by Bijaykrishna Goswami	497
15. My First Visit to England	507
16. Five Months in the 'States'	539

Book I

**In the Days of My Youth
(1858-1885)**



SYLHET TOWN FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RIVER SURMA

BIRTH AND PARENTAGE



I was born in village Poil, in the district of Sylhet, on Kartik 22, *Shakabda* 1779 (1265 Bengal era), corresponding to November 7, 1858. Sylhet is now a part of the administrative province of Assam; but at the time of my birth, and for many years afterwards during the whole of my boyhood, it was a Bengal District in the Commissionership of Dacca. Assam too was then a part of the Lieutenant-Governorship of Bengal, under a Commissioner. When the Commissionership of Assam was made into a separate Province under a Chief Commissioner in 1874, Sylhet and Cachar were transferred to the new Administration very much against the wishes of the people of these districts, who are all Bengalees and are still crying out for reunion with Bengal.

Poil is a large-sized village, one of the largest, in the district of Sylhet. It has a large population of Brahmins and Kayasthas, two of the higher castes of the district, with a fair proportion of the other Hindu castes. It has also a large Mahomedan population, headed by a zemindar family, who are connected with almost every aristocratic Mahomedan family of Tippera, Mymensing and Dacca.

It is difficult to say offhand who were the original or aboriginal natives of this district; but the family history of most of the higher caste Hindus, at present resident in the district, clearly shows that their forefathers came and settled here in some long forgotten past from Bengal, particularly from that part of it known to old Bengalee geography as Dakshin Rarh. And it seems that our family was the very first, among the higher class Hindus of Poil, to come and settle here. I read in our family history and genealogical record that one Hiranya Pal came with his wife from a village called Mangalkot in Burdwan district and took up

his abode on the 'south bank of the river Booriganga' and gave the name of Poil to his new settlement. There is no 'Booriganga' now in the neighbourhood of Poil. Perhaps, the river 'Khoai,' which flows by the village at a distance of about a couple of miles from it, was called 'Booriganga' at one time; or it may have been mistaken for the river of that name which flows by Dacca, and which name must have been familiar to the wanderer from distant Rarh. My father, Ram Chandra Pal, stood twenty-fourth in a direct line from this Hiranya Pal, reputed to be the founder of the clan of Pals of Poil. The village of Mangalkot still exists in the Katwa subdivision of the Burdwan district. I made enquiries of my friend Babu Kumudranjan Mullik, the well-known Bengalee poet, who is familiar with Mangalkot and its neighbouring villages, whether there were any Pals of the Batsya Gotra in that village. He wrote to me to say that though there were no Pals now in Mangalkot, a big tank there still goes by their name as 'Paler Dighi', from which it appears that at one time there must have been a rich and influential family of Pals in that locality.

My father was educated in Persian and was reputed to be a good Persian scholar according to the standards of those times. Persian was the court-language in Bengal in those days, and his proficiency in it secured for my father, first, the position of a clerk and then of *peshkar* or bench-clerk in the court of the *Sadar-Ala* or Subordinate Judge of Dacca. He was living at Dacca at the time of the Mutiny, and I heard it from him that on the Sunday morning, when the sepoys in the Dacca Fort were betrayed by one of their own men and cut down to pieces by the British, the drains of his house ran in blood.

A story of my father's official life, when he was *peshkar* or bench-clerk in the Subordinate Judge's court at Dacca, may be recorded. The Subordinate Judge liked his bench-clerk very much and so entrusted him with a local enquiry in connection with a dispute between two very wealthy zemindars, Babu Kali Narayan Ray of Bhowal and Mr Wise. Both of these were powerful men and a terror to the people. When my father arrived at the locality, he was approached by the agents of Babu Kali Narayan Ray with a present of a purse of two thousand rupees. My father

Birth and Parentage

dared not refuse this. He could not accept it either. So he asked them to send the money to Dacca, as it was not safe to carry so much cash with him, and especially as he would not submit his report before going there. This was done. He put in a true report of the case and refused the present; and was called a fool for it by the Subordinate Judge in open court.

It was not Indian officers only who, like this Sadar-Ala at Dacca, connived at or even openly encouraged these corruptions, but English officers also sometimes took the same view. A retired English Civilian, who entered Parliament, once declared many years ago that there were few Indian officers who did not accept bribes. A Bengalee gentleman, who had served under this English official, corroborated this. This British officer himself used to distribute the work of assessing values in land-acquisition cases among his Bengalee subordinates, and openly appraised their worth by their capacity to reap the highest financial benefit to themselves from this work.

Examination for the grant of *sanads*, authorising the holders to appear and plead before British courts, was first instituted when my father was still employed as Peshkar in the Subordinate Judge's court at Dacca. He appeared at this examination. Somehow or other all the examination papers from the Dacca centre were lost in transit to Calcutta; and in consequence of it all those who had sat for it were granted diplomas. Armed with it, my father commenced to practise at Dacca. Shortly after, he was offered and accepted the post of *munsif* in the district of Jessore. I do not know how long he was stationed at this place. It could not have been very long because my mother never went there. When I was about three or four years of age, my father was posted to Koterhat, near Nalchiti, in the district of Backerganj. In those days the *munsif* was not only a civil judge, but also exercised some measure of criminal jurisdiction as well. At Koterhat my father combined in him the functions of both Munsif and Deputy Magistrate.

My mother was my father's second wife. Her name was Narayanee. She was born in the village Shatiajuri near the present railway station of that name on the Assam-Bengal Railway. My

maternal grandfather, Ramkrishna Kar, belonged to the well-known Kars of that village. My father married her, a girl of ten or eleven, during the life time of his first wife. I heard the story of this marriage from my mother. My stepmother was without any issue and when humanly speaking, she despaired of getting any, she wanted my father to take a second wife for the preservation of his line. My father would, however, hear nothing of it. What was the use of going against the Divine Will, he urged. This did not satisfy my stepmother; so she commenced to look out for a suitable bride for her own husband. And she herself selected my mother for him. I do not remember how long my stepmother lived after my mother's marriage. My mother told me that she died when I was about two years old. My mother used to tell me that she never tended me herself; my stepmother looked after me as long as she lived. She was quite conscious when death commenced to close upon her; and when she was nearing her end, she took out her jewels and despite the fact that her brothers were then in straitened circumstances placed these in my mother's hands with the request that these should be preserved for my future wife. My mother used to say this also that though sometimes my stepmother had her differences with my father, her treatment of my mother was uniformly most sincerely loving and considerate, and never did an angry look or word escape her towards my mother.

At the time of my birth father was, I think, still employed as bench-clerk or *peshkar* in the Subordinate Judge's court at Dacca. But I saw the first light of day not at Dacca but in our village home at Poil. My earliest recollections go back, however, not to my native village but to Dacca, where I must have been taken when I was hardly two years old. I have a faint picture still clinging to my mind of a fairly good-sized brick-built house with a high gate. One of the windows of this house overlooked a mosque; and I remember that I used to sit at this window and holding my ears with my small hands imitated the man who called the faithful to prayer.

I have, however, more vivid recollections of Koterhat in the Backerganj district. It was a small place on the bank of a small

Birth and Parentage

river, which was infested with crocodiles. Backerganj is in the very heart of the delta of the Ganges and forms almost a part of the Sunderbans, the notorious habitat of the world-famed Bengal tiger. As the waters about Koterhat were infested with crocodiles, so the land was infested with tigers. We used often times to hear the growl of tigers at dead of night from our beds. Huge beasts were almost every week killed in the neighbourhood and brought and laid out in front of my father's court-house by peasant-folk in the hope of some reward. Reports of people having been carried away by crocodiles or killed by tigers used also to reach us every now and then.

The *munsif's* court stood upon somewhat high ground on the bank of the river. It was a thatched bungalow. The *munsif's* private quarters consisted of a number of detached huts, covered with thatch, the walls being of mats and bamboos, with mud floor. My father's quarters were surrounded by a cluster of huts, which formed a small colony of our own people from Sylhet, who had gone with my father in search of their fortunes to his new place of work. Some were my father's relations; many were his neighbours and retainers. But my father religiously refused to acknowledge his relationship with them. I still remember how he summarily dismissed a near relation, who was employed under him, because he had inadvertently given it out that he was connected with the *munsif*. My father never employed him in his office again, and, if I remember aright, he had to leave Koterhat soon after his dismissal.

One incident of our life at Koterhat has clung to my mind for the last seventy years. I think I was then about four years old. My father used to have me with him during his meals, particularly during his morning meals. One day as we, father and son, sat down to our meals together, my mother served some green, called *kalmi* in our vernacular, that grows wild in tanks and other pools of water. It seems that my father had not seen this particular kind of green in his house at Koterhat; and so he asked my mother wherefrom she had got this green. She said that a Patuni woman had brought it from the other side of the river. My father queried, "Did you pay her for it?" My mother said that it was a

very common kind of green which grew wild, and no one either asked nor was paid any price for it. At this my father pushed off the platter set before him and walked out in great anger, severely admonishing my mother for having accepted it from this woman without paying for it. He had this woman immediately sent for and having paid her some coppers as the price of her green, he strictly forbade her his house, threatening her with candid punishment if ever she came near it again. Now, the reason of it was that this Patuni woman had a scape-grace of a son who used to be hauled up every now and then before my father for petty thefts and other minor criminal offences. My father could not, therefore, afford to have his mother about his house for any consideration whatever. This incident resulted in my father's, and necessarily in my mother's also, going without breakfast that day; and my mother remembered it as long as she lived.

My mind has very often gone back to my memories of Koterhat, the natural scenery of which impressed me very much. It was a wild place and the play of the tides upon the river and the tanks and other pools of water captured my infant imagination very powerfully. How the waters would overflow the banks, sometimes flooding our courtyard during high tide. was a great wonder and mystery to me, and how I loved to wade through the shallow tidal currents, how I longed to see tiny fishes coming out of their hiding places, as it were, for a stroll along the highways of the village—all these used to fascinate me very much; and I remember the sensation still!

One other incident of our life at Koterhat has also tenaciously clung to my memory. My younger sister was then about a year and a half or two years old. One morning she was lying asleep on the floor of our bedroom, my mother was engaged in cooking in another hut. Coming to see how she was, in the interval of her cooking, she found two big reptiles, *go-shap* (iguanas), lying flat and evidently asleep in the vicinity of my sister's bed, one on each side. I had followed my mother into this room; and I seem still to see before my very eyes how she stood petrified by sudden fear at the sight of these monsters lying almost on her child's bed. But with great presence of mind she did not scream or do

Birth and Parentage

anything to frighten the beasts. In a few moments the reptiles opened their eyes and, seeing my mother standing near, slowly moved out by a side door and rushed to the bush in our back-yard which was infested by their tribe.

Chapter 2

HOME INFLUENCE AND EARLY EDUCATION



“For five years a son shall be treated with great tenderness. For ten years he shall be subjected to rigorous discipline. When he attains his sixteenth year the father shall treat his son as a friend.” This is a translation of an old Sanskrit couplet attributed to the great Chanakya. The tenets of Chanakya were much in vogue among the higher classes of Bengalee society seventy years ago. My father shaped his life in many respects by these wise sayings. He followed this injunction of Chanakya almost religiously in my upbringing. Up to my sixth year I was treated by my father almost as a young divinity. Every whim of mine was satisfied. No one was permitted to lift a hand against me. Though my mother did not observe this law, my father followed it scrupulously and resented its violation even by my mother.

I was not at all a very quiet child. And my parents found it difficult to keep me out of harm's way. Nor did their moral and educational code allow them to leave me in charge of the servants. My father tried, so far as he could, to keep me constantly near him. But he had his work to do. So every morning, while my father was poring over the the files of the cases that he would have to try in court, I found myself inside a large bamboo-and-cane *topa* or *polo*, as they are called in our parts, with which the village folks catch fish in shallow waters during the dry months. I still remember the scene how my father used to sit and read his papers or books or write his judgments, and I used to sit and play near him inside that *polo*. At meal-time I used to have a seat placed for me at right angles to my father's and he used to feed

me with his own hands. Father and son used to take their food out of the same platter. It was my father who gave me my daily bath at the time he had his own. And every night I slept by him, almost inside his protecting embrace.

Looking back from this long distance upon those early memories, I often times feel tempted to try and realise how my father felt towards me, and ask myself very often, have I the same feelings and mental attitude towards my sons? I cannot say whether my father tried to 'spiritualise' and 'idealise' the carnal relations of life, as the modern-educated people try sometimes to do with the help of what is called the 'religious imagination'. I know also this, how we try but frequently fail, to touch reality with the help of these exercises. But I have a feeling that the way my father tended me in my infancy was part of his real practical religion. He looked upon me—and in later life he plainly said this more than once—not only as an earthly or family asset but as an instrument of his well-being on the other side of the grave also. My father personally never worshipped, that is, tended with his own hands any idol or divine image. The caste to which he belonged has not this privilege, which is exclusively allowed to the Brahmins. But I have an idea that up to the fifth year of my age, my father tended me with the same devotion and almost with the same spirit of holiness and religion with which the devout Brahmin tends the image of the God he worships. My father was a Vaishnava, and I sometimes wonder if in the scheme of his personal religion I did not represent to him, during my innocent infancy, the symbol of Bala-Gopala or the child Shree-Krishna. How I long to know all these things! How I wish I had understood something of the Vaishnavic cult and culture during my father's lifetime, so that we could talk these deep things of life together and understand each other more intimately than what was possible in the days of my youth.

My mother, however, did not follow the rule of Chanakya. She was a very strict disciplinarian. I do not remember to have been treated by her, in my early infancy much less in my later boyhood, with outward fondness. In this she differed from most mothers that I knew in my early days. She was remarkably

reserved and self-contained. I cannot say if it was part of her original make of mind and soul, or whether it was acquired by self-discipline, which she felt called upon to exercise by the invidious position she came to occupy in my father's house as co-wife. But in my infancy and boyhood she was so studiously eager to conceal her affection for me that for many years, indeed until I was quite a young man of fifteen or sixteen, I could never free myself of the idea that she was not my mother, but only my step-mother. I was not very strong as a boy, neither was I as quiet and inoffensive as weak children usually are or ought to be. I had consequently many a quarrel with other boys in our neighbourhood, when we left Koterhat and my father came and settled in the town of Sylhet; and not being very strong physically I frequently got licked. It was my double misfortune. Because whenever the story of such a quarrel reached my mother, as it generally did, she never cared to enquire into the cause of the quarrel, and whether that was just or unjust, but used to give me a severe hiding for it. The one question with her was, why should the son of a gentleman quarrel and fight with another person? A gentleman, in her rule of life, never fought or quarrelled or did anything that was mean and selfish. I did not understand these things then, and always inwardly resented the injustice and cruelty of her treatment of me. But now I know and understand how her one aim and intention in bringing me up was, to make me a gentleman, a *bhadralok*, as she used to say, according to her ideal. She was indeed, in a way a very proud woman, proud of her blood and her husband's family, though this pride never sought any obtrusive or offensive manifestation but simply organised itself in her mental aloofness and moral reserve, never in her self-assertion but only in her self-suppression.

But the indulgence and tenderness which I never received from my mother in my infancy and boyhood, I had in a super-abundant measure from my nurse. It was the custom in those days to send a maid-servant from the paternal home of a young bride to her new home in her husband's family. Slavery of a kind was still extant in this province during the early life of my father. Every 'respectable' family had a few 'slaves' attached to it.

They were not labourers like the slaves in the Western colonies before the system was abolished in the last century but were really members of the family with an inferior social status. This maid-servant, who came to my father's household, was really a member of this class and belonged to my mother's family. She lived with us until I grew up into quite a young man, when my maternal uncle's marriage took her back to his home, as there were no female members in his house at that time who could look after his young wife.

For nearly twenty years she lived in our house, not as a servant but only as a loved and respected member of the family. My mother called her *didi*, which is a term with which elder sisters are addressed in Bengali. I used to call her *mashi*, which is the term for auntie—mother's sister—in our language. My father never addressed her by her proper name but used to call her 'Kanchaneer-Ma' or Kanchanee's mother, Kanchanee being the name of her daughter. To call any elderly person by his or her proper name, whatever be the caste or social rank of that person, was considered very uncivil and a sign of **low** breeding in those days in Bengalee society. Elder brothers **are** regarded to rank almost with the father and elder sisters as **entitled** to about the same respect as the mother in Bengal. **Wife's** elder sisters are, therefore, entitled to almost the same honour as the mother-in-law herself. And Kanchaneer-Ma was treated in my father's house in every respect as if she was really my mother's elder sister.

In my early infancy my father rarely talked direct to my mother before others. My grandmother died when my father was a little boy. My father had no brothers or sisters nor any cousins either as members of the joint family. There were, therefore, no elderly ladies in the house except my stepmother, when he brought his young second wife to him. As long as my stepmother lived she must have been the controller of his household. Upon her death, which took place when my mother was hardly seventeen, Kanchaneer-Ma came to occupy that position. My father always treated her as if she was almost his mother-in-law, and through her he used to consult the wishes of my mother even when she had attained the maturity of a matron. She was literally my

mother's and also to some extent even my father's, friend, philosopher and guide in all matters concerning their family and household. She never hesitated to admonish my mother whenever she went wrong, particularly when she treated me with undue severity. In my boyhood, she used always to stand between me and my angry mother whenever I did anything wrong. I still remember how many a time she threw herself between my back and my mother's birch and took the chastisement upon her own body in going to save my skin. I got, therefore, quite naturally, far more attached to her than I ever was in the days of my boyhood to my mother. I still remember how I used to fly at people who teased me by saying that Kanchaneer-Ma was dead; or when they said that they were going to get her remarried according to the new Widow Re-marriage Act of Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, which was then the universal talk of the people. She was much older than my mother. I think she had lost her only child Kanchanee before my mother was born, and had nursed my mother with all the love and longing of a bereaved mother's heart. Her love and affection for me had its root, it seems, in her early love for my mother and grew in strength and volume as it came down from her to me, her first-born. Considering the stern and reserved nature of my mother, my young heart would have been starved of all love and tenderness if it had not been tended with such fondness by my auntie or *mashi*.

At the age of five, after Sarasvatee, the Goddess of Learning, had been duly worshipped, I was initiated into the mysteries of the Bengalee alphabet by our family priest, one of the finest specimens of the old race of Brahmins, simple and unostentatious, without the least suspicion of conceit of caste or of sanctity of religion in him. He was not a Pundit, that is, had no title from any *tol* or seat of Sanskrit learning but he knew Sanskrit sufficiently well to be able to read and understand such spiritual books as the Bhagabad-Geeta and the Adhyatma Ramayana, which I heard him recite and expound in my schooldays. The first character which I was made to trace, after my initiation, was called 'Anzi'. It finds no place in either the Sanskrit or the Bengali alphabet, and the sound or the sign is never found in use anywhere. I wonder

what this 'Anzi' really stood for. We read in Manu that all learning must begin with the recitation of the mystic syllable 'Aum' or 'Om'. We read in the Upanishads that this 'Aum' or 'Om' is the Everlasting Reality, that it is Brahman itself. "This Om is *param* or the highest; this Om is Brahman. Knowing this Om the devotee is glorified in the realm of Brahman." But mediaeval Hinduism had interdicted the study of the Vedas, including the Upanishads, to Sudras. In my infant days, the Bengalee Kayasthas had not remembered that they were not Sudras but Bratya Kshatriyas or Kshatriyas who had fallen from their high state as Dvijas or twice-born among Hindu castes, and they had not as yet revived their claim to the rite of initiation or *upanayana* and the study of the Vedas. We could not then utter the sacred and mystic syllable 'Aum' or 'Om'. Was this 'Anzi' a substitute for 'Aum' or 'Om' for the use of Sudras, I wonder. I do not know if this 'Anzi' still figures in the initiation of our people into the mysteries of the Bengali alphabet and forms a part of the ritual of *Vidyarambha* even today.

Shishu-Bodh was the name of the first printed book placed in my hands. I do not know if it has entirely ceased publication; but though possibly less scientifically arranged and much less nicely got up, I liked this book much better than I did the more modern *Shishu-Shiksha* or *Varma Parichaya* which I had to read later in the school to which I was sent. These modern primers take the youthful minds, for whose benefit they are written, to be far less mature than they actually are. A boy of five or six knows, feels and understands much more than what is usually taken for granted by the manufacturers of the present-day primers. Their interests in life are very much deeper and wider than what the stories of familiar animals and little boys, which are served out to them through these books, seem to take for granted. *Shishu-Bodh* had, of course, the Bengalee alphabet but instead of placing a number of single words before boys and girls to help them to be familiar with the alphabets, it at once started with nice attractive stories, the subject-matter of which riveted the attention and often times enthralled the imagination of little folk, and thus taught them the use of the alphabets without any serious and

conscious effort. Most of the stories in our current school primers of the class to which *Shishu-Shiksha* belonged are common-place, stale, jejune; these neither excite youthful curiosity nor inspire youthful enthusiasm or idealism. They do not touch any of the deeper emotions, neither of wonder nor fear, nor any other, which are so common in the psychology of little children. In this respect *Shishu-Bodh* was much better than most of our present-day primers. Another distinguishing feature of *Shishu Bodh* was the collection of Sanskrit *slokas* which it contained. These were mostly taken from Chanakya or were at least believed to be his. These are in very simple Sanskrit so that even our peasant folks, innocent of reading and writing, can sometimes understand what they mean. They can be very easily committed to memory. They serve, therefore, both as moral instruction and as exercises for the memory. When taking my lessons from *Shishu-Bodh* I was never put to the amount of torture to which I was subjected, I very well remember, in learning my lessons from *Varna-Parichaya* or *Shishu-Shiksha*; yet while I soon forgot practically everything that I had been forced to commit to memory from these latter textbooks at my school, many of the things that I learnt from the former book still live in my recollection.

Looking back upon these ancient memories, it seems to me that I received my first lessons in democracy, even as a little boy, from the text reproduced in this book from Chanakya. Among the very first stanzas which I was made to read and commit to memory was one which said that of the two, the master of a kingdom and the master of knowledge, the man of culture was superior, because

স্বদেশে পূজ্যতে রাজা বিদ্বান্ সর্বত্র পূজ্যতে
Swadeshe pujoyate raja bidwan sarvartra pujoyate

(While the king is honoured only in his own country, the man of learning is honoured everywhere.) Of the stories in this book, that of Data Karna, the man who sacrificed his first-born to do his duty as a householder by a guest, made the profoundest

impression upon my child-mind. I read and re-read it and eagerly committed the whole poem to memory until it became almost a part of my mental life.

I did not go to school until I was about ten years old. The custom of engaging private tutors had not come into vogue in those days. My father was my first tutor. He taught me the alphabets. He made me recite Sanskrit *slokas* from Chanakya and other books, all of these *slokas* having been retained in his own memory, and which, taught by him, formed the whole of my mental repertory in my early boyhood. It was he who taught me my first Arithmetic through the old addition and multiplication tables which I was made to repeat after him and commit to memory. Every evening after his court work was over, he used to sit with me and teach me these things until dinner was ready, when father and son went together to our evening or night meal.

When I was about seven years old, the *chowki* at Koterhat in Backergunj was abolished, and my father was temporarily thrown out of employment. He went home to our native village, Poil. And here an incident happened which showed the strength of my father's character, that has had possibly very great influence in shaping my own also. Upon reaching home, my father heard it that the leaders of the village society had unfairly put a poor Brahmin family out of caste through the spiteful influence of a few powerful people. My father sent for those who could help him to know the whole truth about this matter; and having heard them all, he sent for the head of this ostracised Brahmin family and at once installed him as his family-priest, and asked him to come and perform the Durga Puja, which was near at hand, in his house. In consequence of it, my father was himself put out of communion by the village Bhadrals and I was told that for sixteen years he lived in this social isolation because he would not be party to what he believed to be a wrong and would not submit to the tyranny of the majority. He did not know English and had no idea of this thing which we call conscience in our modern parlance; but his own sense of truth and right always towered

above all considerations of material advantage or social expediency. I came to know later in life many other instances of this trait in his character.

My father was, however, not long out of employment. Before the long Puja vacation was over, he was offered, and accepted, the post of *munsif* at Fenchuganj, in his own district of Sylhet. Fenchuganj is a station now on the Sylhet-Kulaura branch of the Assam Bengal Railway. Before this line was opened, it was a very important station of the Cachar-Sunderbans Steamer Service of the India General Steam Navigation Company, which has, since some years past, been amalgamated with the River Steam Navigation Company and a joint service is maintained, now by the amalgamated company between Calcutta and Cachar via the Sunderbans. When my father went to Fenchuganj (about 1864 or '65), it was a small village. I went there with my father. Our house stood upon a hillock, on the bank of the river, and commanded a very long view of the land and watercourse. The *munsif's* court-house stood upon another. I do not remember if my mother came to live here, it seems that she did not. My one joy here was fishing with the rod in the river below our house. My father also loved this sport very much ; and though following the injunction of Chanakya he imposed all sorts of disciplines upon me at this time, and ceased to treat me with the manifest tenderness which marked our life at Koterhat, we found a common object of pleasure in fishing and helped each other very often to catch the poor fishes of the stream flowing by our bungalow.

Chapter 3

SCHOOL DAYS



My father did not continue in service for long. I was growing up and it was time that I went to school. But in those days there were no schools except in the district headquarters. The exigencies of his service gave him, however, little chance of being stationed at headquarters. He found, therefore, as he wrote to me many years after, no alternative to his resigning his post as *munsif* and returning to his practice as pleader. From Fenchuganj he soon came and joined the Bar at Sylhet. This was in 1865 or 1866.

There was no English-knowing lawyer in Sylhet at that time, and my father found no difficulty in soon getting to the very top of his profession. He had the reputation of being a good Persian scholar—was especially noted for the quality of his Persian style or *ebarat*, as it was called. Owing to his service on the Bench, his knowledge of law and procedure was also very sound and of a high order. And all these helped him very materially in his profession as lawyer. I have no idea what his actual income was; but I think it stood somewhere between two to three hundred rupees a month, which was quite a high income in those days, when the cost of living was very low, and a man generally counted fairly rich on hundred rupees a month.

Life also was very simple. Even among British officials, the District Judge alone had a carriage which was driven by a single horse. The Magistrate and other high officials maintained their dignity by riding on ponies to and from their offices. Among Bengalee gentlemen, one person only owned a four-wheeler, and he combined with his profession of law the ownership of a big *zemindari*. Another brother-pleader of my father had a buggy which he used to drive himself. The rest of the local gentry walked about their business on foot attended by a servant, who held a

huge bamboo umbrella over their head and carried their papers in a big bundle on their back. These umbrellas were from four to six feet in diameter, and were held up with strong and long bamboo poles. To walk under the shade of these state-umbrellas, as they might very properly be called, was considered quite aristocratic in those days.

Good, fine rice sold at about two rupees a maund. Any time a big fresh fish of the best species could be had for from four to six annas. Milk could be had at the rate of twelve to fifteen seers a rupee from the milk-men. In the villages, every peasant household had its *go-dhan* or wealth of cattle, and they often times gave away their excess milk for the mere asking, as their dignity as cultivators would not let them sell milk, which might even lead to loss of caste. Ghee or clarified butter sold at from eight to twelve annas a pucca seer of eighty tolas. Pure mustard oil was usually sold at about four annas a seer. Wages were correspondingly low, and domestic servants could be had at monthly wages of from eight to twelve annas, with all found. And in view of it all, it was nothing strange that people passed for rich on forty to fifty rupees a month, and could spend freely on religious and other ceremonials.

Rent was very low even in the towns. My father rented a fairly big building, though not quite in repairs, which he had to do himself, standing by the public road in the very heart of the town, almost at a stone's throw from the District Judge's Court and close to the other courts and the Saddar Bazar (called Bandar Bazar), and he paid, if I remember aright, eight rupees a month for it. It stood upon more than four acres of land. In the course of a year or so quite a small colony of officials and lawyers grew on this plot. The central portion with the brick structure was occupied by my father and a friend and very distant relation of his, who was employed as Deputy Inspector of Schools. This gentleman, the late Rai Saheb Nabakishore Sen, was for some time with my father at Dacca in his college days. His sister had been married to a maternal uncle of my father. He shared the central brick building with us. Babu Deenanath Sen (father of Babu Priya Nath Sen, editor and proprietor of the *Herald* of Dacca), who has left

his mark upon the history of English education in Dacca, and who rose to the position of Inspector of Schools, was a class-mate and contemporary of Babu Nabakishore Sen. Nabakishore Sen might have risen as high in the service, if he had not been transferred from Bengal to Assam upon the institution of the new province and the transfer of Sylhet and Cachar, which formed his jurisdiction, to the new administration. But though deprived of the larger opportunities which the Bengal Educational Service offered to his colleagues and contemporaries, Babu Nabakishore rose to the highest place in the Subordinate Educational Service of Assam. Sylhet owes the organisation of her primary and middle vernacular schools and, indeed, that of the entire school system of the district to Babu Nabakishore Sen. A man of very exceptional native intelligence and purity of character, combined with very rare tact and great dignity of deportment, due to his high birth—because his family held a very high position among the Bhadrals of Sylhet, Tippera and East Mymensing—Babu Nabakishore Sen became the recognised leader of Sylhet society long before his retirement from service with the title of Rai Saheb.

After settling down at Sylhet, my father first sent me to school with a Mahomedan *maulavi*. It seems he wanted that I should not be entirely cut off from the culture which claimed him as its own. But I did not stay long with this *maulavi*. Having learnt the Arabic alphabet, I started, in about six months' time, I think, to read *Shah-Nama*. But I could not proceed farther than the first page, or possibly even less, only the first few sentences of this book, a word or two of which *Karima babaksha*, etc., I still remember. And my father in utter despair took me away from the *maulavi* and put me in an English school. Looking back upon my early attempt to learn Persian, it seems to me that not my native intelligence or my capacity for application was really at fault and was in any way responsible for my failure. The system was unsuited to my nature. I was asked to commit to memory things that I did not understand and the meaning of which was not explained to me. The *maulavi* evidently wanted to train my ear and memory first, and when I had committed the story to memory, he would take me through its grammar and meaning.

That process did not evidently suit my impatient intellect, which was eager to know and understand, before trying to remember things. I found this out when I was put to read English. I had absolutely no interest in this new study until I could essay to express my thoughts in this language. And an English letter which I wrote to Babu Nabakishore Sen, who had gone on his inspection tour to Cachar, when I was just commencing to read and spell 'b l a bla', etc., was the talk of the elders for many a year to come. It was the first English letter of mine, which like all primitive language was simply a string of words without or with very little verbs or prepositions. Thinking of it now, it seems to have been an indication of my mental character and constitution. Words without meaning never could enter my mind or were retained by my memory. Even to this day I can never keep in my mind non-essentials in the things that I read, while the essential facts or thoughts are retained in a very fair proportion. My memory is like a very faithful record-keeper, who furnishes me with whatever may be wanted for my work, out of its own storehouse of facts or thoughts, which, however, for the very life of me, I could not recall at any other time. And this mental constitution of mine is, I think, responsible for my failure to study Persian. I wish, however, Providence had otherwise ordained my early education and that I had been able to get a fair hold upon Persian, before I went to the English school. That would have stood in very good service today, and would have been of immense help and profit to me, both intellectually and spiritually, in making a comparative study of our Bengalee Vaishnavic poets and the great Persian poets, among whom there seem to exist so many deep and soulful affinities. But what was to be has been.

There were three English schools and one vernacular school in the town of Sylhet when my father went and joined the Bar there in 1866. Of the three English schools one was a middle school, owned by a Bengalee gentleman, and the two others taught as far as the entrance standard of the Calcutta University. The first English school in Sylhet was a government school. It was established, I think, before the Mutiny, in pursuance of the new education policy laid down in Sir Charles Wood's historic Despatch

of 1854, which is rightly regarded or, more correctly speaking, was regarded before the present reaction set in, as the "great educational charter" of the Indian subjects of Great Britain. This school was, however, abolished during the dark days of the Mutiny and for some little time Sylhet was without any English school. I have no notion as to what results were achieved by that first English school in Sylhet, but it could not have been much; for when I went to Sylhet I found that one Rev. Mr W. Pryse was described as the Father of English education in my district.

Mr Pryse was still living in Sylhet in 1866, though he no longer was a regular teacher in the two missionary schools which had been started by him and were owned by the Mission to which he belonged. Pryse belonged, though in a smaller way, to the type which was represented by Carey, Marshman and David Hare, and latterly, by Duff in the larger history of English education in Bengal. He was educationist and philanthropist combined; and the first generation of English-educated men of Sylhet always cherished his memory with deep love and respect. A library, got up by public subscription and located in the Town Hall of Sylhet, is a small attempt of our people to keep the memory of this good and kind man green among them.

The town of Sylhet stretches from east to west along the bank of the river Surma. And these two schools were located almost at two ends of it. One was situated in the eastern part of the town, known as Nayasharak; while the other was at Sheikh Ghat, on the western boundary of it. Nayasharak was close to my father's residence and I first went to this school. The school at Sheikh Ghat was however reputed to be the better of the two; and in a few days I got my transfer to it. When I went there, the late Babu Jay Govinda Shome, an Indian Christian gentleman from my own district, a student and convert of Dr Duff, and one of the graduates of the Calcutta University, the very first to win the distinction of passing his B.A. and M.A. examinations in the same year, was the headmaster. Babu Jay Govinda Shome rose subsequently to considerable distinction as a leader of the Bengalee Christian community. He was a lifelong friend of Babu Kali Charan Banerjee, the finest specimen of the Bengal school of oratory,

who made his mark both at the High Court Bar and at the Calcutta University of which he was a Syndic for many years and became, towards his closing days, its Registrar. Babu Jay Govinda with the help of his friend and co-religionist, Babu Kali Charan, founded the weekly newspaper, the *Indian Christian Herald*, of which he was the editor. Later in life, he realised the need of organising a truly Indian Christian Church which would graft the fundamental doctrines and disciplines of Christianity on to the general social and spiritual traditions of Hinduism. I had talks with him on this highly interesting topic, after I too had settled down in Calcutta and was engaged as a lay preacher of the Brahmo Samaj and Babu Jay Govinda's idea, I found, was to secure recognition of the worshippers of Jesus Christ as a sect of the Hindus.

Babu Jay Govinda Shome did not continue for long in his post as headmaster of the Sheikh Ghat School. He was succeeded by Babu Durgakumar Basu, whose services were subsequently transferred to the government school at Sylhet when it replaced the missionary schools about the year 1869 or '70. Babu Durga Kumar spent his whole official life in Sylhet as Headmaster of this school.

The school houses both at Nayasharak and Sheikh Ghat were very simple structures of bamboo and mat, with the roof covered with a kind of straight and smooth grass, very much like the English hay, without the smell of it. It is called *chhon* in our local vernacular. The posts were either of trunks of trees or of a kind of strong and straight bamboos, which grow in abundance in the district, particularly in its hilly tracts. The partitions were of mat. Wooden benches for the boys and chairs, made of split bamboo and cane which grow in the district in large quantities, for the teachers constituted the principal school furniture. The boys had no desks, and the school library consisted of just a few books, which found place, along with the school registers and other school records, inside an almirah. There was no clock or timepiece in my first school. At Sheikh Ghat we had a sun-dial set upon a brick platform in front of the school house. But it was of no use on cloudy days; so there was another device also to mark time. It consisted of a light metal cup with a very small hole, almost of

the size of a very small pin in the centre. This cup was placed on a vessel of water, and the time it took to get filled and sink marked one hour. The *chowkidar* or watchman of the school kept watch and ward over this time-marker, and took out the cup as soon as it sank, and rang the gong indicating the hour of the day. The boys played tricks with this time-cup whenever the *chowkidar* was either absent or was found dozing away; and unless they overdid the thing and tried to steal not minutes but quarter or half hours from the regular school time, they were not detected. During the last period, between three and half past three in the afternoon, which last was the hour for dismissing the classes, there was an almost constant procession of little boys to the room where this precious hour-cup was kept, and many a time they gave a little push to the cup to hasten its sinking. We used to call this device water-clock or *jal-ghari*.

There were eight classes in our school, counted from the first or entrance class, the class which prepared students for the University Matriculation Examination, called Entrance Examination in those days to the last or infant class, where boys commenced to learn the English alphabet. Murray's Spelling Book and Pyaree Charan Sircar's First Book of Reading were the textbooks for the lowest class in English schools in Bengal in those days. I read Murray's in preference to Pyaree Charan Sircar's, I do not know why except this that that was the prescribed text in the Sylhet Mission School in my time. Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar's *Varna-Parichaya* Part II, and Madan Mohan Tarkalankar's *Shishu-Shiksha* Part III, were my earliest Bengali textbooks at school. In the lowest class of my school, I read these, and was taught mental arithmetic. English and Bengali calligraphy or hand-writing formed also an important and compulsory subject in this class. When I got promoted to the next higher, the seventh class, elementary geography, notation, numeration and simple addition and subtraction were added to my curriculum, along with Vidyasagar's *Akhyan Manjaree* for my Bengali textbook. At the close of my second year at school in 1868, I got what may be called a double promotion, that is, I was allowed to pass over the fifth and was taken into the sixth class. I forget what my English textbook was

in this class, possibly it was *Third Book of Reading*. It was in this class that Lennie's *English Grammar* was first placed in my hand. Akshay Kumar Datta's *Charu-Path* Part I; Vidyasagar's *Charitabali*, a collection of biographies of European savants and philanthropists and men of science, with *Padya-Path* Part I and Loharam Shiromani's *Bengalee Grammar* were among my textbooks in this class. But this double promotion instead of being a help became a very serious handicap to me in my studies; and from this time onward I lost the position which I had secured in my eighth and seventh classes. My growing intelligence could not evidently keep pace with the subjects of my school studies, and I commenced to take a lower place among my class-mates. There was, however, one subject in which I fairly maintained my position, and that was English. I remember how the District Judge, coming to visit our school at this time, saw my English exercises, and highly commended me for my English composition. It may have been partly due to the fact that my teacher introduced me to him as the son of my father whom he knew so well and held in great respect. At least this was how the superior boys in my class tried to explain his partiality for me. But I think I really had even then a certain aptitude for languages. I know this much in any case that I used to write English in utter disregard of the rules of grammar, but yet with some distinction of childish style, and a certain amount of flow; and it seems this was what attracted the notice of the District Judge.

Bat and ball, not the more scientific game of cricket, which came into vogue a few years later, when I was in the third or second class of my school, and *kabati* or a kind of wrestling, were the principal school games in those days. But I was never an expert in these games, having been rather sickly in my boyhood. Fishing with the rod and line was my principal sport at home; and a small tank in our compound, just in front of our house, which was full of small fish, and a small rivulet which flowed by the public road and lost itself in a marsh at the back of our quarters, that ran down in fairly strong currents during the rains, carrying a lot of fish from neighbouring tanks, found very good ground for this sport. As at Fenchuganj, so here also, my

father used very often, after his return from his work at court, to join me in it. During the Puja vacation, when the courts and schools used to close for about a month we enjoyed very good fishing in our own tank at Poil which had quite a large stock of big fish.

The present government school at Sylhet was established when I was in the fifth class of the missionary school at Sheikh Ghat. It was in 1869, I think. There was trouble between the missionaries and the local gentry. I forget what was the cause of it, possibly some conflict between Hindu orthodoxy and the teachings of Christianity. The missionaries either themselves or through their Indian converts, some of whom were employed in their schools, gave some cause of offence to the sentiments of the Hindu community; and the latter became very anxious to boycott their school. I have a very faint recollection of a new school having been set up in opposition to the mission school and I was transferred temporarily to it. An agitation was also set up to secure a government school in the town, and my father took a fairly active part in this agitation. As a result of all this, the government school was established about the middle of 1869. An unoccupied bungalow standing on a small hill in the northern part of the town—just opposite a higher hill known of old as Monaray's Tila (*tila* is a hillock in the local vernacular) which subsequently accommodated the government school in a big brick building that stood on it—found the first habitation for the new school; and we all went to it. Babu Durga Kumar Basu also resigned his place as head master of the mission school at Sheikh Ghat and assumed charge of it.

It was about this time that a soda-water machine was set up in Sylhet and a Mahomedan from this factory commenced to bring soda-water and lemonade to our school everyday to sell to the boys. We used to enjoy this new drink very much and treated one another with it. It so happened that I had a bottle of lemonade from this man the price of which had not been paid at the time. One morning, as my father was just starting for his court, this man appeared at our house. Asked as to who he was and what brought him there, he said he had sold some lemonade to me

and he had come for the price of it. My father called me at once, the debt being admitted and immediately paid, he caught hold of me and gave me a severe hiding, the memory of which still sends my flesh creeping into my bones. I was guilty of a double offence, first, of enjoying something which I had not paid for, and second, which was far more serious from my father's point of view, outraging the rules of caste by drinking water touched by a Mahomedan. All this came through my reading English, he said, and at once took me away from the school. For full six months I did not go back to school after this incident.

My mother was not with us at Sylhet at this time, but was staying at our home at Poil. She came back after six months; and seemed to have convinced my father of the futility of keeping me away from school and thus ruining my future in a hopeless fight against the inevitable tendencies of the times. So I went back to school again.

In this connection I remember another anecdote of my school-days and how I tried to pay back my father for the chastisement which I had for drinking lemonade. This happened about a couple of years later. I had an attack of choleraic diarrhoea. My father, though otherwise a man of very strong character, used to get unusually nervous if there were any illness in the family. This illness of mine made him very anxious. He sat by me the whole day. Towards evening a large number of people, his brother pleaders and other officers from the court, came to see me. I was exceedingly thirsty and the doctor in attendance said I might have some lemonade. It was immediately sent for, and my father himself poured out a glass of it for me and held it to my lips. But I nodded my head and refused to touch it, saying that it was unholy, having been manufactured by a Mahomedan. I was, of course, not at all serious. I simply wanted to settle old scores with my father. He insisted upon my drinking it, as there was no harm in taking even forbidden things if prescribed as medicine. "Everything of Narayana if it came as medicine"—*aushadh rupe Narayana*—he urged. After much coaxing at last I drank the

refreshing draught. And I have never forgotten the sense of satisfaction I had as a boy by scoring this point against my father.

In those days I used to read a fair number of outside books. The Calcutta School Book Society was then the chief purveyor of English and Bengali books. Babu Nabakishore Sen, my father's friend and co-tenant, was the agent of this society in Sylhet; and he used to regularly indent all the new Bengali publications of this society. These publications mainly consisted of pleasant stories from foreign literature. *Cheendeshiya Rajkanyar Upakhyān*, or the Story of the Princess of China, was one of these Bengali publications which fascinated me very much. The story of the Weaver of China was another book of this kind. *Gulevakaolee*—translation of some Persian story—and *Kaminikumar*, both of which were rather prurient publications, which modern-educated parents would be sorry, if not very seriously angry, to find in the hands of their children, were two other books that caught my boyish fancy. I read all these, however, before reaching adolescence; and I do not think that they did much harm to my mind or morals.

My father's discipline did not extend to my readings. He rarely took any notice of what I read. He was quite satisfied as long as I did not keep evil company; or did anything revolting to his sense of propriety or piety.

As I gradually advanced towards the entrance or matriculation class, my textbooks approached the standards of that University examination. Bain's English Grammar, Morell's Analysis, Clarke's Physical Geography, Todhunter's Arithmetic, Euclid's Geometry, Barnard Smith's Algebra, Mensuration and Surveying with Field Exercises, Sanskrit Grammar (Vidyasagar's *Upakramanika*) and *Rijupath* (selections from Vishnu Sharma's *Hitopadesh* and the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*), Bengali *Charupath* Part III, Hygiene or *Swasthya-raksha*, Indian History (Lethbridge's) and English History (Collier's), McMordie's English Composition, Rowe and Webb's Hints on the Study of English, Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield*, Addison's *Spectator*, Johnson's *Rasselas*—these were the principal textbooks which I read at school between the fourth and

the first or entrance class. Scott's *Tales of a Grandfather* and *Gulliver's Travels* were among my home studies at this time.

Babu Durga Kumar Basu, our Headmaster, used to teach us English and History. And I have always felt that I owe whatever aptitude I may have got in handling the English language to the training which I had from him in my school-days. He used to take us to the central concept of every word which we read, by giving its root, the historical developments and the changes in its meaning, wherever there were any. Trench's *Study of Words* was a favourite book of his, and I read it, at his instance, when I was in the second or preparatory class of the Sylhet Government School. This was a very useful training for me, and I have often wondered if I could use English words with the freedom and felicity with which I am credited if Babu Durga Kumar Basu had not led me through this training. He helped me also very materially in this by recommending suitable English books for my private studies as soon as he found that I was fairly able to read and understand them without the help of a coach. In this way, I read many English books as a school boy, which most Bengalee students read now, if they read them at all, after they have left school and joined the university. Lamb's tales from Shakespeare and Thackeray's novels were already more or less familiar to me when I left school for the university.

Chapter 4

DOMESTIC LIFE IN SYLHET DURING MY SCHOOL DAYS



Upon his arrival at Sylhet from Fenchuganj my father lived for a few days with a maternal uncle of his, at that time practising in the local Bar. He was much older than my father. I have a very faint recollection of him. There is only one fact in connection with him which still lives in my memory, because it was the talk of the town for some time. Upon his death, which took place at Sylhet, a number of currency notes of higher values were accidentally discovered inside old copies of Law Reports belonging to him. I have remembered this incident as a proof of the sense of insecurity in which our people used to live in those days. In rural parts people used to bury their savings underground for safe custody, and when paper currency was introduced, townsfolk evidently thought old and useless books and papers the safest repository for their money.

In a few days, however, we went and took up our quarters in the old and dilapidated building which my father rented and to which reference has already been made in an earlier page. My mother was not with us at that time. The house was not yet quite ready to receive her. It was surrounded by a jungle, and the building was entirely out of repair. It took some time to put it in order and make it fit for family residence. There were only a couple of rooms which could be used, and we lived in these. But it was somewhat of a wildlife. The rooms had no well-fitted doors. As for windows, the whole building had none; windows were not in fashion in those days. The grounds around, and particularly the land at the back of this building, were infested by wild cats and cobras. And I still remember how difficult it was to keep our

milk from the attacks of these unbidden and wild guests. Sometimes it was the wild cat that had its meal on our milk, and sometimes it was some cobra which entered our room and drank the milk off. Sometimes in the depth of winter even tigers used to pay a visit to the town from the neighbouring hills; and how we children would creep into our quilts at the sound of the fox, called *pheu* in our parts, which is said to always accompany tigers and give warning to the neighbourhood of the approach of this enemy of man and cattle! With the clearing of the jungle, the wild cat left our grounds for more peaceful and safe resorts, but it took many years to get rid of the cobra. I still remember two or three adventures that we had with huge cobras. One of these happened on a Sunday. It was about 2 o'clock in the afternoon, and my father was taking his siesta in his office-room. The season was June or July, the very height of summer. The doors of this room were all closed to keep the heat and glare of the mid-day sun out. Our gardener was clearing the jungle in the backyard, preparing the ground for the planting of summer vegetables and greens. Suddenly there was a frightened cry, and running out to see whence it came, we found the gardener attempting to escape from a big cobra which was trying to get at him with its hood extended and its body raised about two or three feet above the ground; the poor man was moving his hoe in front of it, crying aloud upon the Goddess Bishahari, the deity which is supposed to preside over the snake-world, for protection, moving backward towards the outer yard of the house. The whole household came out at this cry, and seeing us all and frightened by our terrified cry, the enemy glided away, and being pursued, entered the room where my father was sleeping, through an opening in the mat-door. I still remember the extreme fear and nervous tension in which we spent the next few moments until we saw the snake slowly moving out by another side of the room, and found my father open the door and come out and enquire what was all this confusion and consternation about.

We lived at this time in such constant fear of these cobras that sometimes we fancied one where it did not really come. An amusing incident of this kind happened one night when we had a

number of guests in our house to dinner. The dinner was just finished, when the cry of a huge cobra having appeared in the kitchen-yard was raised. It was a moonlit night; and we all went to see the reptile. The servants came out and ran with big bamboo-sticks to kill it. There, in the shade of a plantain bush, lay the deadly thing curled up in a circle, with its hood slightly raised. Simultaneously two or three blows came down upon it from the servants, and lo and behold when we all thought with great joy that a big enemy had been laid to rest for ever, it turned out to be nothing more or less than a dry plantain leaf lying in the dim moonlight. And the young lady who had raised the alarm came for a good deal of ridicule from those whose relationship permitted them to cut jokes with her.

In about two years' time our grounds were almost cleared of the jungle with which they were covered when we first came and occupied our new home here. Babu Nabakishore Sen came to share the pucca building with my father, and thatched houses were constructed on the outer or front yard. Gradually two other gentlemen, one a *munsif*-court pleader and another a clerk in the Public Works Department, who was a distant cousin of mine by my father's side, came and built their residence on either side of our quarters. We thus formed a small colony.

By this time my father's family also grew to fair proportion. My maternal uncles, both of whom were younger than my mother, two cousins, one of whom was a little older than myself, and another younger by a couple of years or so, the sons of my only maternal aunt, my mother's sister; a cousin of my mother; a brother of my stepmother; two of my own cousins by my father's side; and a boy who was not at all related to us but whose father finding it difficult to provide an English education for his only son had come and asked my father to give food and lodging for him—these formed our new household at Sylhet. Besides these there were two or three relations, much older than myself who, coming in search of employment to the town, also lived with us at this time, of whom one, a cousin of mine, worked as my father's clerk. Among female members of the family there was an old aunt of mine, the widow of a distant cousin of my father, who

having no home or family of her own, came to live with us at Sylhet. My younger sister, the only one that grew up—all the others, and I had quite a number of them, had died in early infancy—was about eight years of age at this time. My old 'auntie', the maid-servant who had come to us with my mother when my mother was married, was, of course, a member of our family at this time also.

We were about nine or ten boys ranging from the age of ten to fourteen in our house at this time. My father had religious scruples to employ a Brahmin as a cook in his house. The cook, whatever his caste, when he worked for wages, became a domestic servant; and my father refused to treat a Brahmin as such. All through his long life he never employed, therefore, a Brahmin cook, whether at Sylhet or anywhere else. The duty of cooking for this large family, consisting of about twenty members, including the servants, fell therefore on my mother. But she never grumbled at it; on the contrary, she took not only unfeigned delight but a very real pride in this opportunity of loving service. There was also a special reason for it, because she was a very expert cook, an accomplishment which once almost cost her life a few years later when I was about the age of fourteen, reading in the third class of my school.

It happened in this way. At that time my father used very often to give big dinners to his friends and acquaintances in the town—almost every other Saturday in the month. On these occasions the company used to number nearly a hundred, sometimes running even to a hundred and fifty, including her own household and the servants of guests, as in those days every respectable guest used to bring a servant with him wherever he went to have his meals. One Saturday my father asked this large company to dinner, which was given in honour of a friend who had come on a short visit to the town from the mufassil. The dinner consisted of about thirty courses—as was usual in those days in Bengalee society—of vegetable, fish, and goat's meat and sweets of various kinds. And my mother prepared all these with her own hands, with such little help from the domestics as relieved the purely physical part of her labour. The cooking was

so well done that before getting up from his meal Babu Nabakishore Sen off-hand invited the whole company to dinner the next evening and sent a request to my mother to take charge of the cooking. My mother agreed; and the next day she cooked for these hundred and fifty people and served them the same number of dishes with some variations. A friend of my father, employed at that time as head clerk in the office of the Dist. Superintendent of Police, invited the same company to our own house the evening following in honour of the same friend from the mufassil and my mother was for the third time asked to take charge of the cooking. She did it all right but after the cooking was over, and the first batch of guests had finished their meals, she went off in a swoon; and for nearly three months after this she hovered between life and death, owing to this serious nervous breakdown. But though she suffered so much and for so long a time for it, she never refused to take the same risks over again and used always to take a genuine pleasure in cooking and feeding people. She never, in all her life, entertained the services of a paid cook in her house.

Though tea had been discovered in Assam some years previously, and tea-gardens were being started in the neighbouring district of Cachar, our people had not as yet taken to drinking it. The elders among the so-called higher classes of Hindus never had anything like an early morning meal. They had only two meals a day, one the mid-day meal at about eleven or twelve, and other the night-meal at between nine and ten. These were the only meals which my father took, though occasionally, after coming back from court, he drank a glass of cold water with a couple of *batasa*, a preparation of pure sugar. We had neither *sandesh* nor *rasagolla* in those days. But our ladies used to prepare a large variety of sweets with coconut and sugar. These were, however, reserved, generally for special festive occasions like, for instance, the *pujas*. The peasants and the labouring classes usually had three meals a day, one very early in the morning, often times at early dawn, which in the winter consisted of hot rice and a little boiled vegetable or curried fish kept from the previous night's preparation and during the hot months, of

cold rice preserved in water, with some fresh baked or burnt dried fish or only with a little salt and curd or whey. Their next meal-time was in the afternoon, when they came back home after the day's work was practically done, and the other was at night time. These were hot meals, and consisted of two or three courses of fish and *dal* and vegetable.

We boys, however, had four meals a day. Our first or early morning meal consisted of hot, steaming boiled rice, with *ghee* and some boiled vegetable. Sometimes we had a kind of porridge made of the broken particles of rice, which was something like a by-product of the husking of rice, called *khoo*d in our vernacular. This, served hot and steaming with home-made *ghee*, was one of my most favourite dishes, and I never cared for any other if I could get it. But at Sylhet we purchased rice from the bazar, and we could not get this *khoo*d, which the peasant-folk kept generally for their own consumption. Our next meal was between ten and half-past ten in the forenoon, which we had after our daily bath and just before going to school. This was a full meal, and we had rice and *dal* and fried fish and vegetable, and curried fish and occasionally curdled milk or *dhai*, or *whey* or *ghol*, called *matha* in the vernacular of the district. We had our next meal after we came back from school, between four and four-thirty in the afternoon. It consisted of boiled rice, *dal*, vegetable dishes from the kitchen of my widowed aunt, and what remained of the preparations for the mid-day meal. At night between nine and ten, we took our meals with my father and other elders, and in some respects this was the principal meal of the day, with a larger variety of courses than could be made ready for the somewhat hasty meal in the morning, when most of the elders had to rush to their work in court or office.

But the one meal which we young-folk enjoyed most was the afternoon meal. After the fairly long school-hours, and the running and romping that we had during the midday recess at school, we were, for one thing, generally ravenously hungry at this time; in the next place, as it combined all the courses of our morning meal cooked in the 'fish kitchen', as it was usually called, with the simple but delicious and spicy and hot vegetable dishes

prepared in the widow's kitchen, this afternoon meal was about our richest meal in the day. But the greatest attraction of it was my mother. At this meal she used generally to come and sit with us, boys and girls, forming a circle round a fairly big bell-metal plate or bowl or *gamla*, in which she mixed the rice and *dal* and other curries and used to feed us with her own hand. We were not allowed to touch the food but sat frequently with our mouths half-open in eager expectancy of the tender hand that came round with the delicious mouthful of food. Looking back upon this scene, I sometimes picture my mother as a fine hen feeding her loved brood. My mother was a fine, fair, tall woman, one of the most perfect pictures of motherhood that I have seen in all my travels almost over half the world. And sending my mind back to the days of my boyhood, and reviving this scene with my present art-perceptions, I often wonder what a beautiful picture we made at this afternoon meal of ours more than half-a-century ago. That scene has passed away from our life, never perhaps to be revived again. We have become more 'civilised', we have larger knowledge of hygiene, and are far more afraid of disease and death, and are perpetually anxious to protect ourselves and our children from all sorts of contagion, even the contagion of our own flesh and blood! The practice of brothers and sisters and cousins and dear friends of boyhood eating out of the same platter or snatching food in loving contest almost from one another's mouth has been condemned as insanitary and unsafe. The fear of the unseen and unknown disease-germs has chilled the natural instincts of our human love and affection to some extent and has made our most endearing caresses more or less self-conscious and calculating!

To me, however, this afternoon meal, when my mother used usually to feed us—and we were about ten or twelve—was sometimes a bit trying. Every one of us, quite naturally, wanted to get the first serving and the best of every course, the most delicious portion of the fish or vegetable, before others. But unless there was enough of these to go fully round to all the children, I could never, by any chance, get a helping. I tried all positions in this charmed circle, some day sitting next to my mother,

sometimes farthest from her, but wherever I might be I never had the first serving, but always and studiously she would serve me last! She had a special order of precedence, it seems, in her own mind; and in this order, those who had no manner of relationship with her, came first; next came our relations by my father's side; then our relations by her own side; after these came my younger sister; and last of all, almost invariably, came my turn! I remember how bitterly I resented this wrong; and in my bitterness often times I actually believed that my own mother was dead and she was only my stepmother! When I grew up—I think I was then reading in the second or preparatory class and was fifteen years of age—and she thought that I could understand and appreciate her ways, she one day explained it all to me. It seems that I had resented something that she did to me that day, and must have cried for it. When my anger had calmed down and I went back to her, she asked me to sit by her, as she was peeling and cutting vegetables for the next meal, and said: "You are growing up, won't you understand these things even now? When shall you then? These other boys in your house have not got their mother here to look after them. If I am not especially careful of their comforts they will be easily neglected; but even if I wish to, I cannot really neglect you, can I?" I replied, "But what about Kripa (my younger sister)?" My mother said: "Oh, Kripa, poor girl, she will be with us only for a year or two more, after which she too will go to her own home, among strangers; while whatever is in this house will remain yours for always. Shouldn't she have for just these few days a little preference over you?" I do not remember if I understood all that she meant then. I do now when I cannot have her back to me to tell her and bless her for all she did. Would my daughters and sons understand!

I often times feel exceedingly thankful that my father was innocent of our modern education and ways. He was not obsessed with the sense of duty towards his own family as most of us are; and therefore did not feel any hesitation in accepting his poorer relations in his own house and treating them as his own. Of all gifts the gift of knowledge was regarded as the greatest by our fathers. And my father never refused to help any one to receive

the best available education so far as his means permitted it. And in those days many people wanted only a little food and shelter for their boys 'in towns' where there were schools, to qualify them for their life. While he was at Dacca he found food and lodging for some poor but promising students. One of these rose later in life to a fairly high position, became the Dewan of the Tippera Raj, if I remember aright. And my father told me that this gentleman wrote frequently to him to let him have me with him to bring me up. Of course, that was out of the question. My father had no need of his help either. But he talked of it frequently with evident satisfaction. I am thankful that my father had these old ideas; because if he had our 'modern' ideas, my early life would have been exceedingly lonely and dreary. I had no brother, and only one younger sister, who coming immediately after me was in our childhood more the object of my jealousy than of my love and affection. And the group of boys and youths who came from different families to live with us at Sylhet found room for the play and exercise of my growing youthful affections.

Besides my uncles, cousins, and one or two boys 'who though not related to us came and lived with us reading in the school at Sylhet, there were others also living with their own people in the same compound with us. We thus formed a fairly large company, about twenty in all. And we had the run of the whole compound, and of every house that stood upon it. The ladies' quarters ran in a line at the back of the men's or outer houses; and though every house was separated by walls of split bamboos from its neighbour, there were doors that led from one house to the other. The ladies though living according to current custom in *zenana* seclusion, had a certain measure of freedom, could, and always did, meet together and spend a few hours after the morning's work was over, in friendly gossip or play. And during school holidays we boys used to have the time of our life during these hours, freed from the restrictions of our guardians and the supervision of our mothers.

A few days after my father joined the Sylhet Bar, the District Judge, one Mr Shaw, retired from service and went 'home' to

England. His furniture, according to the usual practice of those days, was sold by public auction. My father took a fancy, it seems, to the small table, teapoy, chair and easy-chair of Mr Shaw's boy, who must have been of my age, and bought the whole lot of this furniture for me. It was a very small thing but this had, I fear, a great effect in shaping my character, even long after I had left school and college. Chairs and tables were not in general use among our people in those days. My father sat and worked on a *farash*, that is, a raised platform made up of two or three large and oblong wooden seats raised on fairly high legs on which a *durree* was spread covered with a bleached sheet with one or two round and high pillows or cushions to recline on, when wanted. He had a few wooden chairs, office chairs, as they are now generally called, in front of this *farash*, for such clients or other visitors of his who were either Mahomedans or Hindus of those castes, *hookas* or pipes filled inside with water touched by whom could not be used by so-called higher caste people. But they had no tables or easy-chairs even in the houses of rich people in Sylhet in those days. In buying the furniture of young Shaw for my use, my father unconsciously introduced a very great innovation in my life, which had, I fear, a far-reaching effect in giving certain impulses to my future life and evolution. In my young days I was very partial to English ways and ideas; and I have often wondered whether the accident that led my father to bring me up, while I was a boy, in the use and enjoyment of the furniture of young Shaw had not something to do with it.

My father evidently bought this furniture so that I might sit at this small table and read and write. But I put these more often to other uses. What was meant to help in my studies was turned by me as instrument of my play. School holidays were then, even as now, more numerous than court holidays. So on many of these holidays, while our guardians were away at their work in court or office, we gave ourselves over to all sorts of frolic and even mischief. In my early boyhood we used to organise imitation schools when my small table and chair rendered excellent service as school furniture. But in those plays, somehow or other, I almost invariably took the part of either the headmaster of the school,

or when someone else contended for this honour, I managed to act as school inspector; and the younger and weaker boys had rather a bad time of this 'play'. Sometimes we changed the subject, and played at judge, pleader, complainant and defendant, etc. And here also, owing perhaps to my closer acquaintance with the ways of courts which I had during the days when my father was *munsif* and I used very often to go and sit by him on a high chair on his *ejlash* or bench, trying to read the Bengali Gazette the time he was engaged in his judicial work, as frequently happened when we were at Koterhat in Backerganj, I was almost invariably the presiding judge. And how proud I felt when, dressed in made-up pants and coat, I sat at my small table, other boys standing or sitting as their position entitled them, about me! I say made-up pants because none of us had any pants then; and what I did was to turn the shirts or coats we had upside down, and putting our legs through the arm of these made them do temporary duty for pants. I remember how while playing at these judicial proceedings I once tried and sentenced a poor dog to be hanged by the neck on a charge of cat-slaughter. The dog was caught hold of and hung by the rope of the *punkha* in my father's office room, and the poor thing, though we did not actually kill him, must have had a very bad time of the **very** few minutes that he had the rope of the *punkha* round his neck!

Sometimes we played at other scenes of the life of our elders also. There was a good deal of drinking in those days in Sylhet among the *bhadraloks*. They were all orthodox people, affecting the *Shakta* cult. Some of our own relations belonged to this group. We were always hearing stories of their doings in the talk of our elders. One day we took it into our head to play at drinking and getting drunk. Our boyish imagination never failed in its resources on these occasions. So we got a big brazen pot filled with water and putting a good dose of salt into it, made this saline preparation do duty for wine, and we got heavily 'drunk' on this not-very-tasty liquid; and acting our parts with great realism, we made a hell of the house for a tumultuous half-hour. Drunken bouts cannot be had without some damage to the furniture of the house. The furniture in my father's house

necessarily came to some grief. The whole room was also in woeful disorder when my father suddenly turned up, earlier than usual from his court. And the servant gave us all away, telling-my father how we had got 'drunk' on a free potation of salt water, and done all this mischief. My father, as I have said, was a very strict Vaishnava. Vaishnavic piety and morals enjoin absolute abstinence as a religious duty. He could not tolerate this evil thing even as a play. Why should sons of gentlemen even play at getting drunk? That was how he looked upon the whole thing. And I had a very severe whipping from him for this folly. I think this put a stop to all our attempts to put again on the stage of our youthful play these scenes from the life of our elders. We too were also fast growing up. And cards and chess, among indoor games, and cricket, *kabati* and riding, among outdoor exercises took the place of these frolics.

When I was in the third class of my school, Sir George Campbell became the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal. Sylhet was still a Bengal district. And the changes that were taking place in Bengal reached us in Sylhet also and influenced our thoughts and aspirations. Competitive examinations for the Subordinate Executive Service were first instituted about this time, if I remember aright. And riding formed one of the compulsory accomplishments of the candidates for appointment to this service. My father evidently had his dreams concerning my future along these lines; so he encouraged me in my desire to ride and manage horses. Babu Nabakishore Sen had a couple of ponies and I soon commenced to take my exercise in riding from him. By the time I left school I became a fairly good rider, and could carry a good horse at the rate of ten to twelve miles an hour.

Swimming was also a fairly favourite sport with me in my school days. My father was my swimming master. When I was about eight or nine he commenced to teach me how to swim. He used to take me to the tank every Sunday and while I screamed and kicked about, he used to push me beyond my depth, and after I had got a few mouthfuls of water into me, he took me up and stretching his forearms underneath my body would ask me to use my arms and legs to keep me afloat. And as he held me

up very lightly, and threatened to take his arms away every now and then. I had no option but to ply my arms and legs as best as I could to save myself from getting drowned. Bladders are not used in our country in learning to swim. Trunks of plantain plants are used instead. At least we used these in the earlier stages of our swimming exercises. Sylhet, like the rest of Eastern Bengal, is a riparian district. The greater part of it goes under water during the rains. Tanks are the principal sources of water supply for the people in those parts that have no rivers. Country-boats were in those days the only means of transportation for six months of the year over by far the greater part of the district. These conditions of their life made swimming a necessity to them; and every child, whatever the sex or the station of life, had to be taught swimming as early in life as possible. When I grew up, swimming and diving became somewhat of a passion with me. My cousins and uncles and the other boys in our house and in the neighbourhood often times competed with one another in this game during the hot summer months, particularly on Sundays and other school holidays. Sometimes we used to walk down to the river Surma that flows by the town of Sylhet to have a swimming competition; and though I myself do not remember to have ever made the attempt, some of my companions used very often to swim across to the other bank, sometimes returning on the ferry boat and sometimes, after taking a little rest, swimming back to the landing stage or *ghat*.

Though many of our elders, including Babu Nabakishore Sen, of whom the young people in our house stood as much in fear as they did of my father, used to play at cards and chess and dice very often after the day's work was over and especially during Sundays and other holidays, my father never took part in these. But I soon caught the contagion, and by the time I got into the third class of my school, I attained considerable proficiency at the particular game of cards called *graboo* in Bengali, which was very popular in those days. I also learnt a little chess but did not attain much success in it. It called for much greater concentration than what I could stand.

Our life at Sylhet was rather simple. We had enough good things to eat, but few or no luxuries at all. My father kept fewer

servants than people of his standing do today. We never had more than three, and more often only two servants in our house, one of whom did all outside work, that is cleaning the pots and pans which used to be put for him every noon and night after the meals were over. He was a so-called untouchable, that is, he could not enter our kitchen or the living rooms because we could not, according to the rules of caste, drink water or take cooked food touched by him, or kept inside the same roof with him. He also carried my father's papers to the court and held the 'state umbrella', when required, over him. The others were what is called caste-men now that is, they could fetch water and clean the kitchen and help in preparing the food though they could not actually cook for my father or other elders. There was no harm in us boys taking cooked food from their hands.

As a rule, these people came from our village, and were either my father's retainers, that is, belonged to the family of our old hereditary servants whose first parents had most probably been bought for a price, or they were his tenants or even simply neighbours belonging to the caste from which domestic servants used to be drawn in those days. But though of a much lower social status, they were scrupulously treated with consideration and even a certain amount of respect. We boys were never permitted to call them by their proper name or order them about as menials. Here their caste did not count at all. We had to address them as *dada* or elder brother, or *kaka* or paternal uncle, or *mama* or maternal uncle. They also, in their turn, used to refer to my parents in the terms of these relationships, as *dada* and *didi* or *kaka* and *kaki* or *mama* and *mami*, and so on and so forth.

I very well remember a servant in our home at Sylhet, who was of a very low caste, indeed, an untouchable, as some people would call him today. He could not enter our kitchen or touch our drinking water or go inside the room where there was any cooked food for us. His name was Sadan. I used to call him Sadan Dada. He was by caste a Mali as it is called in our parts. The occupation of this caste is very much like that of scavengers in our modern towns. They swept the outer yards of the house

and the lanes and roads, constructed privies, but never touched or removed night-soil. He used to address me as 'Thakurdhan', the pet name which my mother gave me. He called my father *mama* or maternal uncle and my mother *thakooran mami*. I have no recollection of his mother, but I have an idea that she was much older than my father and used to address him by his pet name of Ramdhan. Many of our retainers used to address him as Ramdhan Mama, which was indicative of the relationship in which my grandparents stood to their own parents and grandparents. One day, I remember, in a fit of anger for having boxed my ears for some mischief that I had done, I called Sadan 'Sadan Mali' and raised my hands upon him. As luck would have it, just at this moment my father turned up there, and I got a severe thrashing for my insolence, while Sadan was asked to beat me soundly whenever I was insolent or insubordinate. A few days later, when I had grown up somewhat, Sadan's wife fell ill when we happened to be at home during the Pujas; and my father was by her sick-bed when the end drew near. I think Sadan married again, and my father practically stood host to his guests from his father-in-law's place, and saw to it that his relations could not find any fault with hospitality, which would reflect much less upon Sadan himself than upon our house. Caste-restrictions obtained in those days only in the matter of eating and drinking; but these never interfered with the exchange of neighbourly good offices or with loving service of the lower or untouchable castes by the higher castes during disease, death, or other difficulties. I was told that when my father was at Dacca, one day he had a man carried to his home, who was lying by the roadside, ill with smallpox, and had him tended there without making any enquiry into his caste.

In fact, in my father's home both at Poil and in Sylhet, the so-called menials were always treated as younger members of the family. His moral code was never outraged by his occasionally inflicting physical chastisement on his servants any more than it was by his giving me a severe hiding when I went wrong. And in my school days a young servant from our village used to be almost daily beaten by my father for his neglect of duty. But he never

took it seriously or felt his dignity and self-respect hurt by this chastisement. He took the thing in very good humour, and when asked why he was so careless and rendered himself liable to these chastisements, he used to say that he rather liked to tease my father and did not mind the mild beating which hurt my father's hands more than his own back!

In my father's home no manner of distinction was permitted to be made between the children and the servants in the matter of food. They had the same quality of rice which we had, and whatever was cooked in the house, or whatever edibles came as presents from friends and relations and my father's clients, used to be served out to them in the same measure as it was to us. I remember very well that at one time during our stay in Sylhet, my father, having purchased a big estate in a public auction, got involved in heavy and costly litigation that very seriously drained his purse. As a result he had to cut down his expenses. He stopped our milk supply. His own health was not so well at this time as it ought to have been. A cousin of mine, seeing my father's growing weakness, insisted upon his having some milk every day. But my father would have none of it; because, as he said, he never had in all his life enjoyed any food himself which he could not share equally with every one in the house, including the servants. That settled the matter and no one dared to reopen the question to him again. Indeed, this was also the rule of life with my mother. If anything, she was even perhaps more particular than my father himself in these matters. When I grew up, and had to look after our poorer guests on festive occasions, she used to tell me always to see to it that they had the very best of everything. "The Bhadrals do not come to your house for a feed," she used to say. "What can you offer them which they do not have in their own home? But these poor people do not always get fine things to eat. And the Bhadrals don't discuss what they eat in your house, whether it is good or bad; but the poor people always talk of it among themselves. The good name of your house is in the keeping of your poor neighbours; remember this always."

We were used to few luxuries in our school days. *Dhoti* or loin cloth, manufactured by local weavers from thread spun

locally, and an upper sheet of the same make and material, was our entire apparel in my early boyhood. Manchester had not yet fully established itself in our markets in these distant country parts. Shirts and coats of the pattern that had come into fashion during the Moslem regime were used by the elders of the higher classes. My father's court-dress consisted of a loose pyjama and a *chapkan* with a *chadar* or thin cotton rolled almost into a rope, thrown over it. He used varnished shoes, but no socks. At home and in his own society he went about in *dhoti* and *chadar* with a *mirzai* or Persian waistcoat, put on occasionally as a protection against cold. His court head-dress was a rimmed *pugree* of plaited muslin, that used to be remade every now and then when it became dirty by the local tailors. My school dress consisted of *dhoti* and *chadar*, and a shirt (without cuffs) and occasionally a coat of imitation silk or wool. When I was very young, I remember to have been given a pair of pants and coat for my school dress. I was allowed only one pair of shoes during the year. It used to be bought during the Pujas, in autumn; and lasted generally three or four months. Sometimes, after I had grown up somewhat, I was found a pair of India-rubber shoes or *goloshes* during the rains. For the greater part of the year, however, I had to go about unshod; and I still remember the ugly figure that I made in going to school in pants and coat, but without socks or shoes.

There were neither chemise nor bodice nor jacket in our society in those days. Women of ill-repute only used bodices in our parts, though *kachulis* were in almost universal use among all classes of women in the other Indian provinces. The Bengalee ladies never put on any 'sewn' garment. My mother never saw a chemise or bodice in all her life. Yet it would not at all be true to say that our ladies went about in those days in a state of semi-nudity. They used one single piece of *sari* generally ten cubits long, and about forty-four inches in width (if I remember aright), and they knew to tie it round their person in such a way that no part of it ever remained in any way exposed. Besides, they never appeared in public in those days. My mother had, I think, just a pair of silk *saris* for use on special occasions. Jewels she had very little, and those were all made of silver, except a string of gold beads which she put around her neck.

Chapter 5

SOCIAL LIFE IN SYLHET DURING MY SCHOOL DAYS



Society in towns is always of a very mixed character. The majority of the educated people in a town are generally outsiders, gathered together in the pursuit of business or through the call of their office. Sylhet had a very small number of English-educated persons in those days; and the result of it was that most of the offices under government were held by outsiders, particularly people from Dacca. This gave birth to a kind of parochial or local patriotism among our people and there was a more or less open rivalry and antagonism between the people from Dacca and other districts residing in Sylhet, and the natives of the district. We of Sylhet used to look upon these outsiders as 'interlopers.'

Society in Sylhet was mainly Hindu; though there were two or three highly respectable and influential Mahomedan families also in the town. The Hindus were broadly divided into two sections; the Brahmins, the Kayasthas and Vaidyas with their dependants and others, water touched by whom could be used by these higher castes, forming one section; and the Shahas, forming the other. The Shahas were a very rich and refined class; but, unfortunately, they were not admitted into the communion of the other high-caste Hindus. They were believed, though we now know very unjustly, to belong to the brewer caste. Recent researches into the ancient history and evolution of the Hindu castes of Bengal have been bringing it to light that more than one Bengalee caste, now condemned to the position of untouchables, were at one time very respectable members of the community. During the Buddhistic period these people held very high position in society. But when Brahminism was established

they refused to submit at first to the supremacy of the Brahmins and were, in consequence of their revolt, condemned to a low status in the new and reconstructed Hindu society. This is how the Shahas and the Subarna Baniks who, as their name implies, were rich and influential merchants and traders, and who, in the pride of their wealth and position, dared to defy the authority of the Brahmins, were relegated to a lower social position. But even to this day, the descendants of those brave people, who refused to sacrifice their conscience to secure earthly profit, have held their head as high as the so-called higher castes, and have not proved themselves in any way inferior either in native intelligence or education or in culture and refinement to the so-called higher castes in Bengal. The Shahas of Sylhet were in those days, as they are even today, about the richest class in the town of Sylhet. They had a fair percentage of English-educated men among them; and they very naturally resented the inferior social status to which mediaeval Hinduism had condemned them.

And while they could not interdine with the Kayasthas and Vaidyas of the district, they used to purchase girls from the poorer members of these so-called higher castes, particularly of East Sylhet, for their boys; and to secure, whenever they could, bridegrooms also from these castes for their daughters. Many Kayastha families in East and North Sylhet came, in this way, to be related to the Shahas, though they could not openly interdine with them and otherwise treat them as members of their own family or caste. Daughters of Kayasthas or Vaidyas marrying a Shaha were never taken back into their parents' house or society but remained for life as outcastes. The same thing happened also to the boys who were married into Shaha families.

This desire of Shaha parents to secure bridegrooms for their daughters from the Kayastha and Vaidya families of the district found field for romance to adventurous youths of the Kayastha and Vaidya castes in our school days. The marriage of Kayastha or Vaidya boys to Shaha girls was often times arranged in secret in those days; and youngmen from our school used sometimes to be tempted to steal away from their home and form these connections. Our people used to describe the thing as

'kidnapping'. And sometimes there was a regular scare in the community over these cases of 'kidnapping'. Whenever any young man did not return home at the usual hour from school, particularly on a Saturday evening, there used to be regular consternation among his family and friends.

The peace of our own household was once disturbed from this cause. I had a young cousin of mine, my mother's sister's son, about three or four years older than myself, living with us and reading in the school at this time. He was a fine-looking youth, supple of limb, and very attractive in both contour and colour, which was of the tint of young and tender leaves that first commence to shoot out at the kiss of the warm southern breeze of early spring and which gave a sense of exquisite softness to the eyes. He had lost his father a few years before, and was just the kind of young man eagerly sought by the parents of comely Shaha maidens. He did not turn up from school one Saturday evening and was away from home for the whole of that week-end; and there was great trouble in our house over his escapade. I forget where he had spent this time but he came back safe and whole on Monday morning. And as the guardians of young men of the Kayastha and Vaidya castes were, in those days, very afraid of their wards making these runaway matches, they dared not take any serious notice of their escapades. My cousin's absence from home was not also taken very seriously either by my father, much less by my mother.

There was, and still is, a very respectable Mahomedan zemindar family in the suburbs of Sylhet, who represented the highest Moslem culture and refinement in the district, and lent considerable dignity and grandeur to the society of our town. Theirs was the only house which entertained high English officials and which was furnished in the prevailing Anglo-Indian fashion of those days. The head of this family in my school days was Syedbakt Mazoomdar, who was a very pious man and had made pilgrimages to Mecca and Medina. The ancestors of this Moslem family had been Hindus. Though their present title is Mazoomdar, their Hindu forbears went by the name of Dastidars. Both Mazoomdar and Dastidar are Mahomedan titles; but the Hindu family name of

these Dastidars was Das. A branch of this family belonged to our part of the district and a representative of this family, Babu Haramani Dastidar, was related to us on my mother's side. He was a cousin of my mother and used very often to come and stay with us in Sylhet. The Mazoomdars recognised their relationship with him, and used to receive him as a clansman or kinsman. Another branch of the same family lives in the suburbs of Sylhet. They are Hindus and have retained the title of Dastidar. They are also zemindars and are counted among the leaders of the local Hindu community.

The Shahas of Sylhet had their own Brahmins. It seems that when they were condemned to a lower social status upon the revival of Brahminism, the Brahmins, who ministered to the religious and sacramental life of the so-called higher castes of Hindus, refused, or were not permitted, to minister to the religious and sacramental life of the Shahas. And these Shahas, when they were forced to come back into the Hindu fold, must have created or ordained a class of Brahmins from among themselves. This has been actually done by some of the excommunicated castes in our time also. And the Brahmins of the Shahas of Sylhet, like the Shahas themselves, used in my school days to seek matrimonial connections with the Brahmins of the higher class, those who were recognised by the Kayasthas and Vaidyas. The representative of a rich Brahmin family of the town, in my young days, had thus originally belonged to the higher class of Brahmins, but he or his parents formed matrimonial connection with this Shaha-Brahmin family and became a member of this caste. These connections, however they might be condemned by Hindu orthodoxy and looked down upon by caste-proud Brahmins and Kayasthas and Vaidyas, helped very considerably to liberalise the social outlook of the whole Hindu community of Sylhet and contributed very materially to bring the ways and manners of the Sylhet Shahas into line with those of the other higher castes of Hindus. And as the Shaha girls in these inter-marriages naturally adopted the name and *gotra* of their Kayastha husbands, there are many Shaha families who cannot be distinguished from their

Hindu clansmen or kinsmen, either by their name and *gotra* or by their character and culture.

Though social intercourse was still regulated by the rules and restrictions of Hindu castes, all the really higher and more refined and well-to-do castes freely mixed with one another except in the matter of eating and drinking. The Shahas are Vaishnavas of the school of Shree Chaitanya Mahaprabhu or the Gauddeeya school; and they used to have all the Vaishnava worships and ceremonials in their house to which the entire Hindu community was duly invited. My father rarely responded to those invitations himself; but he used always to depute someone from our house to these socio-religious functions. When I grew up this deputation generally came to me.

Of the Vaishnava festivals, *Jhoolan* or the Swinging Festival was the most popular among the Vaishnavas of Sylhet in those days. It was held during the week preceding the full moon in August. This full moon is called in our calendar as the *Jhoolan Poornima*. And the festival commemorates the *leela* or sport of Shree Krishna with Shree Radha, when he swung with her to the tune of heavenly music in Shree Brindaban. Images of Radha and Krishna, either in bronze or silver or stone, were placed on a throne which was made to swing, while devotees or hired musicians sang appropriate songs. There were a number of Vaishnavic temples or *akharas* in Sylhet in those days; some exist still, though they have lost their old position and prestige. These *akharas*, most of which had been originally endowed by rich Shaha gentlemen, were in my school days in charge of holy Vaishnavas from Upper India, Ramayat or other mendicant devotees who, having renounced the social order, were outside or above all caste-restrictions. We could take our food from their hands, though my father hesitated sometimes to do so. The *Jhoolan* festival used to be performed with great *éclat* by these *akharas* in our time. We used to visit them during the *Jhoolan* week, when the town became resonant with strains of music and the talk of sightseers passing to and fro, in the cloud-covered moonlight, all through the night. As soon as the rains set in, we used to look forward with very great eagerness and expectation

to this *Jhoolan* week, when we went about from one festive house or *akhara* to another, seeing the pretty decorations and illuminations of the places of worship, making our homage to the divine images with presents of money, partaking of sweets wherever the rules of caste did not interfere with it, and elsewhere receiving 'pan and attar', gossiping all along the way with friends and school-mates. This was the only time of the year when I had the freedom of our moonlit highways and byways, and the memory of the youthful abandon with which I used to throw myself into it still sends my old blood rushing through my veins. I did not understand either the music or the words of the exquisite love-lyrics which used to be sung by professionals or more often by devout amateurs on these occasions; but the mere joyousness of the thing, the weird beauty and romance of the moon trying to peep from behind flying banks of cloud, and the company and fellowship of young friends, who clung to each other almost lover-like while walking in this moon-light, all these had a very great fascination for my youthful imagination and emotions.

Though not exactly a social function like the *Jholan* festival, *Ratha-Jatra* or the Car Festival, which falls in July was also a very popular Hindu institution in Sylhet in those days. And the beauty and grandeur of this festival were contributed almost entirely by the Manipuri community of the town. I cannot exactly say when these people first came to Sylhet, whether before or after the first Manipur War. There was a house in the town in our school days which was known as the palace of the Manipur Raj or Manipur *Rajbatee*. Raja Gambheer Singh was said to have been brought as a prisoner to Sylhet and this house was either built for or given to him as his residence. Gambheer Singh had been dead long before my time, but his name and tradition were still green in the public mind. A number of Manipuris lived in and about this 'palace'. There were colonies of this people in other parts of the town and its suburbs also. Originally these Manipuris must have been Buddhists like the rest of the Mongolian stock from which they came, but they were converted to Hinduism by some disciple of Shree Chaitanya Mahaprabhu about the 16th century of the Christian era. Since then the Manipuris, as a class,

Memories of My Life and Times

follow the Shree Chaitanya cult and look upon Navadvip, the birthplace of Shree Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, and the other localities associated with his life, as sacred places which they visit in large numbers during the various Vaishnava festivals, particularly during the *Holi* festival, which falls on the full-moon day of the Bengalee month of Falgoon, corresponding to February-March of the English calendar.

The Manipuris are a very fine race. Though of undoubted Mongolian origin, with flat nose and long-drawn eyes of the Chinese and the Jap, their pigment while still preserving the yellow tint had taken perhaps owing to our climate and association, a much softer hue than is usually seen in the yellow races. They have, besides, a general tenderness of flesh and form which one does not always find in the tougher specimen of this race. And this tenderness is also reflected in their mental character. Bengal Vaishnavism has had perhaps something to do with this special feature of the Manipuri mentality. Though classed as Hindus, the Manipuris, at least in my school days, were free from some of the popular prejudices and customs of the rest of the Bengalee Hindus. They formed, so far as I can remember, one single caste, and regarded themselves as Kshatriyas, claiming descent, I think, from Arjuna, who had during his exile married a daughter of their race. All the Manipuris therefore wear the sacred thread after the manner of the Kshatriyas. Though claiming to be Kshatriyas, they did not necessarily follow the profession of warriors, for which at any rate in British India there was in those days little or no scope. The Manipuri community in Sylhet followed many professions; some were weavers, some carpenters; some were agriculturists, while some were engaged in buying and selling, especially food-products. Manipuri women did not observe *zenana* seclusion; nor had they adopted, with their Vaishnavism, the custom of early marriage from their Bengalee teachers. They have very fine artistic instincts. Lovers by nature of flowers and leaves, with which both men and women beautifully decked themselves, the homestead of these people frequently looked like a picture or a place of divine worship, so clean and so orderly was everything about it. I think these Manipuris are the cleanest

of the clean people of Hindoostan, both in their person and their ways and habits. They are strict vegetarians and are the best-washed humans in these parts. They use sandal paste regularly. And all these things contribute to the peculiar loveliness of this race. Their dress also is simple. Unmarried and young girls use a kind of bodice or jacket and a skirt; but the elderly women go about with one single piece of thick cloth, tied with a knot above their chest, that falls down to their ankle, with the arms, head and the upper part of the body bare. The men use, or did use in my school days, the ordinary *dhoti* and *chadar* affected by the general body of respectable Bengalees. I do not remember to have seen a Manipuri, whatever his social position or economic condition, going about like our poorer and working classes, with only a narrow loin-cloth tied round the waist. And this seems to have been due to the especially developed art-sense of these people.

The Car Festival was peculiarly a Manipuri institution. The *akharas* or Vaishnava temples, of course, had their cars on which they used to place the images of their deities and bring them out into the street. But the private cars came mostly from the Manipuri colonies of the town. And there was a speciality in these cars. The temple-cars were built of wood, were preserved from year to year, being repaired or repainted from time to time. But these Manipuri cars were simple light structures of bamboo and reed, the roof being uniformly of beautifully woven fresh leaves generally of the jackfruit tree, and adorned with flowering creepers, mostly the scented *Madhabi*, so beloved, according to Pauranic tradition, of Shree Krishna, and the gold-tinted *Champaka* or the ever-green *Malancha* wreaths, that looked like live snakes, coiled round pillars or hanging from the caves of these cars. These cars looked therefore, more like lovers' bowers than the war-chariot of Arjuna in the field of Kurukshetra, which they were meant to represent. But the character of the worshippers always alters the nature of the symbolism through which they seek to worship their deity.

The *Ratha-Yatra* or the Car Festival attracted large crowds from the villages, and the streets along which these cars used to

be drawn were converted for the day into a big fair where a good deal of business, particularly in fruits and toys for young folk and bamboo and rattan things of household use and sweets of various sorts, was carried on. Every car was preceded by a company of musicians playing on the holy *mridanga* and cymbals, and chanting *Keertans* or religious songs describing the career or character of Shree Krishna or simply dilating upon the great virtue of chanting His sacred and salvation-giving name, and the whole county-side rang from afternoon, when the cars commenced to come out into the streets, up to late in the evening with the name of the Lord and the cry of "*Hari-bol*." But to us, young folk, the thing that found the greatest attraction was the sight of the Manipuri cars and the general crowd of the fair.

Another festival, to which our Manipuri neighbours made the largest contribution, was *Rasha-Yatra*, which falls on the full-moon day of Agrahayana, corresponding to November of the English calendar. This *Rasha-Yatra* commemorates the dance of Shree Krishna in Brindabana with the *gopinees*, chief of whom is Shree Radha. It was like a ball such as they have in European society, only with this difference that among 'sixteen hundred *gopinees*' there was only one male partner in this ball, and he was Shree Krishna; but the *Bhagavata*, the sacred book which relates the sports of the Lord, says that at one point in this ball when the *gopinees* gave themselves up to it with absolute abandon, Shree Krishna multiplied himself and every *gopinee* found him dancing with her in this great and charmed circle of dancers as her sole partner. The festival of *Rasha-Yatra* has been ordained to symbolise and commemorate this sport of the Lord. In the Bengalee Hindu home they make images of Radha and Krishna and setting them on a circular plane they worship the Lord with the *gopinees*. But the Manipuris performed this festival in a different way. Instead of setting up images of Radha and Krishna, they dressed up the youth and maidens of their own families from the age of seven or eight up to that of fifteen or sixteen or even more as Krishna and Radha and they had this sacred dance or ball with these lovely and pure-minded youth and maidens as partners. These young people decked out in

leaves and flowers—the plume of the peacock adorning the crown of the young men, who carried in their hands reed flutes to represent Shree Krishna—dancing in a large hall covered from floor to ceiling with green leaves and flowers of various sorts and the air resonant with soft and weird music of saranga and fragrant with the scent of a hundred flowers, presented the loveliest scene that I have witnessed in all my life. Such combination of nature and art, such display of colour and contour, such unstudied expression of the very soul of the music and the dance in the face and eye of the dancers, such unconscious innocence with just a suspicion of budding and conscious romance of an absolutely impersonal character, are things that are not, and I am afraid can never be, found anywhere in our civilisation. No one who has not seen this Manipuri *Rasha* can understand the poetry and purity of the Vaishnavic idylls that have been woven around the Radha-Krishna legend and cult in this country, particularly in Bengal. The whole town used to turn out during this festival that lasted for some days, as it reproduced not only the great ball in Brindabana but many other episodes in the life of Shree Krishna there, including the destruction of the demon called Baka-Asura. This last was, I think, the closing exhibition of the life of Shree Krishna by the Manipuri youth and maidens of Sylhet in our time.

Sylhet was pre-eminently a Vaishnava town, though there were some very influential Shaktas or worshippers of the Shakti cult among the Brahmins and other so-called higher castes in the suburbs, who were notorious for their drinking habit, which formed in those days an element of the worship of the Goddess Kalee. The Shahas were entirely Vaishnavas. The Subarna-Baniks in Bengal are, I think, of this denomination. And it may possibly be due to the greater liberalism and freedom from Brahminical prejudices of the Vaishnava cult and culture, particularly of the followers of Shree Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, that these remnants of the old Buddhistic communities were brought inside the Hindu fold through Vaishnavic propaganda. Be that however as it may, the Shahas of Sylhet were all Vaishnavas; and consequently many Vaishnavic institutions flourished in the town. Scenes from the story of the life and *leela* or sport of Shree Krishna, like the

Rasha Leela (already mentioned) which was yearly represented with such exquisite art and beauty by the Manipuri youth and maidens, were enacted by the community from time to time. *Goshtha Leela*, in which the boy Shree Krishna as cowherd led the calves and cows of his father's place to wild pasture-grounds in the woods, along with those of his neighbours, led by the boys and youth of those families, and in which, having taken the cattle to their pasture, the youthful cowherds enjoyed themselves in all sorts of sports—formed one of the most touching episodes of the boyhood of Shree Krishna. The *Goshtha Leela* presents a perfect picture of pastoral life and depicts, with inimitable beauty and tenderness, the romance or *rasa* of *batsalya* or parental affection and *sakhya* or youthful friendship. During my earlier years at school in Sylhet, this episode of Shree Krishna's life and *leela* used to be annually reproduced upon a large and realistic scale, with young boys as cowherds and quite a flock of well-groomed cows and calves, with cotton or silk wrappers thrown over their back and garlands of various wild flowers on their neck. They used to be collected in a central square of the town, and taken with appropriate hymns and music to the hills outside it, where the company used to spend the day in various sports mostly representative of the life of Shree Krishna, and have their meals there, and return home with *keertans* and illuminations by nightfall. Practically the whole town joined in this sport, which took place, if I do not forget, on the Gopastami Day, or the eighth day of the moon in the quarter of the month of Kartic; and it was really a red-letter day in our local calendar. This *Goshtha Leela* is the subject of some of the finest lyrics of the Vaishnava poets of Bengal; and these used to be sung with great skill by either professional or amateur singers. And among the latter the very best was one Babu Kunja Behari Sen; I have an idea that he had learnt his art from the *keertanias* of Burdwan and Nadia. I had no understanding of his art in those days, nor had we, little boys, any perception of the theme of his songs, but there was a charm in the man, in his voice and expression, which captivated our unilluminated intelligence also. Looking back upon these simple pleasures of our simple folk sixty years ago, I wonder what a

pleasant and pure life they must have lived before the dawn of our present civilisation.

All round the seasons we had something or other to kill the dull monotony of our lives. *Gostha Leela* took place in the month of Kartic corresponding to October-November of the English calendar. The *Rasha Leela* took place in the month of Aগ্রহায়ণ or November-December. Then there was Pous or Makar Sankranti in January. It celebrated the winter solstice or the turning back of the sun from its southerly course (*Dakshinayana*) to its northerly one (*Uttarayana*). There was very little religious rite connected with this festival. But it was celebrated all over Bengal in those days as what may be best described as a Day of National Sports. The young folk of every village used to build toy-houses of bamboo and straw gathered from the fields the previous evening. Early next morning they used to take their bath in rivers or tanks, as the case might be, and then shivering with the bitter cold of the wintry dawn, they would gather around these toy-houses, and setting fire to them, warm themselves by the fire of these burning houses. This was also the day of what has been called the 'cake festival' in Bengal. The ladies used to prepare a large variety of cakes and sweets for this occasion, and there was a general invitation to all friends and neighbours, particularly to the young people of the village to these cake feasts. In the afternoon, the whole village, old and young, used to assemble in some open space, generally the village pasture, and there used to be all sorts of sports and manly games here. Thus the whole day was spent in feasting and playing; and though we missed the simplicity of rural life and relations in the towns, the Uttarayana Sankranti was a school holiday, and as our elders had to attend their business in court or office on this day, this not being a holiday observed in the government offices, we enjoyed it much better. Then in February or early March, there was the Sarasvatee Puja or the annual worship of Sarasvatee, the Goddess of Learning and the Fine Arts in Hindu symbolism. In my father's house we did not set up any image of this goddess; but the priest performed the *puja* before a new earthen pot, which represented the presence of the deity; and we, young people, still in *statu*

pupillari, had to repeat certain *mantrams* and make offerings of flowers to the goddess. We were not permitted to open our books or touch our pens on this day. And we spent it in various games and sports. The whole of the month of Chaitra, the last month of the Bengalee year, was perhaps the gayest part of the year in Sylhet in those days. Kite flying was a very popular sport in the town; and the wealthier towns-people used to spend a lot of time and money over it. They used to make huge kites, and there used to be a keen competition among rival houses or communities over this game. They prepared special twines of cotton or sometimes even of silk, to which broken glass used to be pasted and dried to render these twines as sharp as possible, so that the twine of the rival kites might be easily cut. Sundays and other holidays were especially utilised for these kite-flying competitions; and I remember that sometimes the party who was victorious went back home at nightfall in procession with torches and music. Sometimes, if there was any foul play, there used to be even free fights between the retainers and friends of the parties. Throughout the month of Chaitra every Sunday there used to be a fair in the outskirts of the town, to which a large concourse of people came from the rural parts near about and, besides the usual buying and selling of all sorts of things, there used to be various kinds of *tamashas* also at these fairs. We had the *Ratha Yatra* in the month of June or July; *Jhoolan* in August or September, and the great Pujas in October-November. The whole year was passed, thus, in a round of feasts and festivals. And all this contributed very materially to the joyousness of the life of our simple people a century ago.

Besides these public or communal or national festivals, we Hindus had an almost perpetual round of private festivities in our homes, to which our friends and neighbours used to be invited, and the general public also had free and welcome access. Travelling *yatra* parties or opera troupes used to visit our town once every year during the dry season. These generally came from Dacca and occasionally also from West Bengal. These *yatras* are a peculiarly Bengalee institution. These are kinds of musical dramas, the different parts of which are represented by boys

and men only. There was neither stage nor scenery of any kind, the only outer help to these dramatic presentations being the dress and make-up of the principal actors which too was of the simplest and most primitive kind. It, therefore, left it to the imagination of the audience to picture in their minds the scenes and situations in which the different parts were being acted. And as the theme of these musical plays was generally some well known episode from the *Puranas* or our religious stories, which were familiar to everybody, the absence of outer paraphernalia and theatrical properties did not at all interfere with the inner enjoyment of it by the audience, particularly the older and really appreciative part of it. But it provided ample enjoyment also for the unilluminated by the introduction of clowns and jesters, whose often times coarse and vulgar ribaldries appealed to the multitude. And we, young people, also belonged to this unenlightened mass in those days, because we had little knowledge and less understanding of the sacred traditions upon which these plays were generally based.

The subject matter of the plays was usually drawn from the story of the *Ramayana*, or from some episode in the *Mahabharata*, for instance, the story of King Nala and his consort Damayantee; and sometimes it was built upon the much more modern and historical incidents of the life of Shree Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. The *Exile of Rama* was a very popular musical drama of my school days. Another was the Renunciation or *Sannyasa* of Nimai or Shree Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. But neither of these plays could be performed in our house. My mother could not stand these tragedies of mother-love. Other episodes from the *Ramayana*, as for instance, 'Ravana-Badh' or the Destruction of Ravana or 'Lakshane Shakti-Shel' or the wounding of Lakshmana by the deadly lance known as *shakti-shel* from the mortal effects of which he was saved through the good offices of Hanuman, who, not knowing the particular herb that could bring the hero back to life, took up the entire mountain where it was to be found, and brought it to the physician attending his beloved Master's brother—these could be played in our house. The story of Nala and Damayantee also did not hurt her mother-love, and

she could listen to and enjoy it, but she could not stand any tragedy which came from the separation of the son from his mother.

The most popular of these musical plays were those that had the love of Shree Krishna and Shree Radha for their subject. The old Vaishnava poets of Bengal, dating from the 15th century of the Christian era, have dealt with this theme with an art peculiarly their own, of which there exists no parallel, so far as I know, in any other literature of the modern world. These lyrics are still sung by our *keertanias* in the style which came into vogue at the time of Shree Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. But these *yatras* are modern compositions and are played in a modern style, though both the words and the music are very largely drawn from the old source. The most favourite composer of these *yatras* in my young days, in our part of the country, was Pandit Krishna Kamal Goswami, three of whose musical plays—*Swapna-Vilas*, *Rai-Unmadinee* and *Vichitra-Vilas*—were the best and used to be most liked by our people. Krishna Kamal Goswami was by caste a *vaidya* or physician; but though not Brahmin by birth, he came of a long line of highly respectable and revered spiritual teachers or *gurus* of the Bengal Vaishnava denomination. He was well versed both in the Sanskrit *Bhagavata* and the Bengalee religious, philosophical and poetical works of the Shree Chaitanya school. His plays breathed therefore the exceedingly devout spirit of our Vaishnavic cult and culture, particularly of our Vaishnavic art. All these plays,—*Swapna-Vilas*, *Rai-Unmadinee* and *Vichitra-Vilas*—were what might be called psychological plays in the truest sense of the term; but the psychological developments and denouements were worked entirely within the mind and soul of the heroines and other principal actors, and not brought out by delineation of outer events and actions, except so far as these were helpful to the quickening of the inner emotions. *Swapna-Vilas* opened with the recital of a vision of young Krishna, who had gone away from Brindabana, in his mother's dream. It was an exquisite picture of mother-love crying out for the absent son, and it delineated how, in the very anguish of separation, the presence of the beloved was realised in the inner consciousness of the bereaved parent. In *Rai-Unmadinee* the poet described

Rai or Shree Radha in her bereavement due to her desertion by her lover, Shree Krishna; and starting with her recollection and recital of her happier days in the company of her lover, finally ended with a 'madness' in which she was possessed with a consciousness of his presence about her and mistook whatever she saw or touched or perceived by any of her outer sense-organs as the form or the touch or the fragrance of Shree Krishna. The entire experience was mental or emotional, subjective; and the processes through which these were gained were purely psychological. As *Swapna-Vilas* opened with the recital of a dream of Shree Krishna seen at the dead of night by his mother Yashoda, so *Rai-Unmadini* opened with the memory of Shree Krishna's flute playing in the woods. Whether this was quickened by some chance playing of the flute by some cowherd, or whether it was purely a subjective experience, and had no outer stimulus at its origin, it is difficult to say. Both interpretations might equally hold good. But henceforward Shree Radha gave herself up with complete abandon to these happy recollections until, at last, she entirely lost all sense of outer actualities and re-lived, so to say, her old life with her lover within herself. She was absolutely mad, and was therefore called *Rai Unmadini* or the **Mad** Rai or Radha. She saw a *tamala* tree on the top branch of which sat a peacock, with its feathers spread out; she mistook it for her lover, and rushed to embrace it; and immediately the cruel actuality forced itself upon her and with return to the outer objective world, she commenced to curse her fate, and gradually sank again into the subjective or trance state and develop the same 'madness' over again. In '*Vichitra-Vilas*' we have more or less the same experiences related in regard to Shree Krishna, who completely obsessed with the presence, within his mind so to say, of his love, Shree Radha, took whomsoever he met for her and rushed to embrace her. This gave endless fun to Radha's female companions, who ran about with a view to escape Shree Krishna's mistaken embraces, crying out "I am so and so; I am not Radha, your beloved Shree Radha stands yonder." I cannot say that in the days of my youth I understood either the psychology or the

art of these operas, but the music and play nonetheless fascinated me very much.

These performances were given by what might possibly be called a kind of public subscription. Some leading gentleman of the town used to be approached by the proprietor of the *yatra* troupe, with a request to arrange for a performance in his house, and invite the local society to it in his own name. He would not have to pay anything himself but the *yatra* party would be quite satisfied with whatever collections might be taken at the performance from the visitors. The host had a silver or bronze plate, with a few rupees, either two or five or more, whatever his own contributions might be placed on it, in front of the players, and every guest personally invited to the performance used to put in his mite, from an eight-anna piece to a couple of rupees, on it; and, in this way, a fairly big sum was collected for the players. These offerings were regulated by a well-known principle. Whatsoever the host was used to pay on similar occasions to his guests parties, generally determined the presents of the latter; and an account of these presents used to be set down in black and white and preserved in every family and returns were made always by a reference to it. This custom obtained in all social functions. No person, however rich, was allowed to give more than what his host paid him on similar occasions. To do so would be taken as an insult. No one, indeed, ever dreamt of doing it.

In this way, a pretty large sum of money used to go out of my father's pocket every year as presents, on these festive occasions. The society in Sylhet was very largely composed of outsiders, who rarely or never had marriages and other domestic functions performed in their town houses. These were almost invariably performed in the villages. The Durga Puja was also performed there. So in the town practically the only social amenities were these musical performances and other social functions. These musical parties were also more patronised by the younger than by the older men. My father rarely gave these. There were others like him who did not patronise these troupes. But they had, all the same, to pay for these in their neighbours' houses. They were entitled to a return of these presents as well. And these

elders used to invite people to what was called 'Purana-Path' or reading of sacred books. As a matter of fact, there were neither sacred books nor any reading of them generally on these occasions. The invitation was to "kindly come and hear the reading of *Purana* or sacred lore," at such and such hour, at so and so's house. The usual hour was a Sunday afternoon; and all the preparations made for the occasion by the host were to clean up his *baitakh-khana* or reception room, spread a clean and bleached sheet on the *farash*, set up a small platform covered with carpet, on which some book (whatever it was mattered really little), tied up in a piece of clean red cloth, in the manner in which our sacred manuscripts used to be tied, was placed, with a few flowers on it, and a silver or bronze plate was put in front of it, on which the guests were expected to put in their offerings of silver (for it was always what might be called a 'silver collection'). The guests used to come and making their obeisance to the tied-up book gently placed their offering on the plate, and spend a little time in conversations with the host or the other guests, *pan* and *attar* being served to them on behalf of the host along with the popular *hookka* or tobacco pipe. This was our 'Purana Path' in those days. It was almost invariably a fiction; and everybody knew it to be so. It was devised to give an occasion to the guests to return what they had been getting from the host during the year as offerings or subscriptions to their own parties and other functions. The money thus collected from these 'Purana-Paths' used to go to the family priest or the *guru* of the host, and sometimes to some learned Brahmin Pandit deserving of public support. I cannot say if this old social institution still exists in our town; but in my younger days it was, though a fiction—and we, irreverent young men, often times used to make fun of it—a very useful institution of our social life, which kept up the self-respect of people in many ways.

Sometimes this 'Purana-Path' found occasion for ugly practical jokes to irreverent people. And I remember how on one of these occasions actually a pair of old and castaway slippers was tied up and wrapped in a piece of red cloth and made to do duty for some sacred book. The secret was given away

subsequently and was the talk of the town for some days. But though this was an extreme case, even in our own house, where my father would never tolerate such irreverence, we could not always secure a real Purana for this function, particularly when our family priest was not present in the town at the time; and I have a faint recollection that once or twice we were driven to wrap up one or two of my father's law journals to serve duty for a holy scripture. The sacred books had not yet commenced to be printed and circulated among the general public; and they were to be found in manuscripts only with learned Brahmins and other devout people. Most people had therefore to do as we did on these occasions.

Though not quite a social function among us, Hindus, the Mohoram was a very popular and exciting institution in our life in Sylhet in those days. Sylhet has a large Mahomedan population. There is a noted Moslem *darga* or shrine in the town, dedicated to Shaha Jalal, who may be called the Patron Saint of the town, which is one of the great sights of the town, visited both by pilgrims and sightseers, and where offerings are made by Moslems and Hindus alike. We used to go to Shaha Jalal's shrine every now and then during our school days. There was a large ostrich egg in this mosque, reputed to have been brought from Arabia, which was one of the curios that attracted considerable notice from visitors. There was a sacred well, where there were a goodly number of 'gold and silver fish', as we used to call them. We now know that these were imported from China and might be had for a few coppers in Calcutta from street hawkers in Dharamtala and the New Market. But in my younger days, particularly in out of the way tracts like Sylhet, these were looked upon as miraculous products, and the 'gold and silver fish' in the well inside the shrine of Shaha Jalal were in some way associated in our minds, like the big ostrich egg, with the holiness and divine powers of the great Moslem saint. In the outer courtyard of the *darga* there was a big tank, which was full of various kinds of fish; and as no one was permitted to catch or molest these fishes, they used to come up to the surface of the water whenever any food was thrown and even take it from human hands. This too was an

object of great wonder and admiration to our boyish imagination; and we used to go, whenever we had a holiday and were not otherwise engaged, to this shrine and enjoy these curiosities.

All over the town there were Moslem populations and every Moslem quarter had its own *akhara* or place of sword and stick play from which *tazias* and processions used to be taken out during the Mohoram. For the whole of the period, from the first to the tenth day of the Moslem month of Mohoram, the whole town was resonant with the music of these *akharas*, while during the last four or five days preceding the final ceremonial, there used to be a great and gorgeous display of *tazias* in our market-place at night and the whole town practically turned out to witness the processions and the sword and stick play of the men. The processions from neighbouring villages also used to come here and occasionally there used to be free fights between the adherents of rival *akharas*. Owing to these disturbances, my father did not encourage our going out at night to witness these rowdy processions, though we did manage frequently to steal out at dead of night and see these from a safe distance. On the tenth or the last day of the Mohurum, when all the *tazias* in Sylhet and the neighbouring places used to be brought to a large open space outside the town, called Idga Maidan or the field of Id, my father used to take us himself to see the show. This Idga is one of finest spots in the vicinity of the Sylhet town; and I have seen few places finer than this. It is an open space surrounded almost on all sides by verdant hills of various altitudes, forming part of the Jayantiya range, which runs along the north of Sylhet up to Shillong, the seat of the present Assam administration. We used to go up to one of these hills whence we could easily command the whole open space wherein the *tazias* and the processions used to come and gather in their respective spots assigned to them by the police to avoid needless friction and fight. The whole of the gentry of the town and the suburbs used to take their seats on *durries* or mats which their men carried from home, and see the show from a safe distance. In my early days, the hills and the jungles about Sylhet were infested by tigers; and even when we went and sat on some of these hills amidst all the crowd and noise of

the Mohoram show, we could not easily rid ourselves of the nervousness due to these memories of roving beasts on these hill-tops. My father also would not allow us to tarry here after dark, though we were always very eager to do so, because the most important and gorgeous of the processions from across the river used to arrive by candlelight.

The Mohoram was one of the grandest institutions of Sylhet in my school days. People were far more virile and bubbling over with physical energy and courage then than they are now. Like all people who live a life of nature more or less in the wild places of the earth, the Sylhet peasantry, especially the Mahomedan peasantry of the suburbs, were quick to resent any insult, whether real or fancied, and free-fights between rival zemindars or social factions were very common. The Mahomedans used to work themselves into a frenzy during the Mohoram. We had no trouble, in those days, during the Id'ul-Fitr or Bakr-Id, as it is usually called. Both the Hindus and the Mahomedans were tolerant of their mutual religious practices. The Mahomedans never objected to the performance of the Hindu Pujas, many Mahomedans actually joining these, so far as they could do it within the limits of Hindu ritualism; and the Hindus were equally tolerant of the religious practices of their Mahomedan neighbours, even of the practice of cow-killing, during the Id. But the Mohoram was different. During the Mohoram processions and plays, different sections or *akharas* frequently came into collision and there were more or less serious breaches of the public peace in consequence of it. The Mahomedans of the town proper were more peaceful than their co-religionists from the villages round about. The townspeople were numerically weaker, and being divided into rival groups, representing the different wards, so to say, they were less consolidated than their rivals from across the river Surma and particularly from a large Mahomedan village called Khitta. The procession from Khitta was the biggest that came to the Idga on the last day of the Mohoram. It was frequently about a mile long and six to eight deep, who rushed with their long sticks of dark and seasoned bamboo, like a large and invading host, making the air resound with the cry of 'Allah' 'Allah,' 'Din'

'Din'; and the very sight of it used to send our hearts throbbing with fear. Sometimes we met this procession on our way back in the dreamy moonlight; and as the procession covered the entire width of the public street, we had to run down to the ditches for fear of being crushed or carried away by this avalanche of maddened humanity. And what a time the local officials had with these processions! The District Magistrate, the Police Superintendent and a good number of police inspectors and constables had to be constantly on the run between the ferry-stage and Idga, trying to regulate these processions, while the Assistant and Deputy Magistrates had to stand guard over the gathering at Idga to see to it that there were no bloody fracas among the different groups. But these memories have faded from the public mind with the passing away of the generation to which I belong.

I heard it from my father and other elderly people in my boyhood that, at one time, in the early days even of John Company, the Mohorum used to be signalised by real tournaments and fights between the rival *akharas*, not with blunt swords or bamboo sticks only, such as we saw, but with a kind of firearms, called *tola*, made of thick bamboo barrels filled with gunpowder, and used as a mortal missile by the people. At the close of the Mohoram, the Idga used to have not a few broken heads and jaws, but one or two dead bodies also, as a result of this wild play. But the manufacture of gunpowder and bullets and their use were prohibited by the government sometime before my school days.

Chapter 6

VILLAGE LIFE DURING MY SCHOOL DAYS



I spent only a small part of my early life in our village. I do not remember to have lived in our country house, which has been the home of my ancestors for many generations past, continually for three months during my conscious existence. My earliest days, as I have said, were lived in Koterhat in the district of Backerganj. After leaving Koterhat I came with my father to the town of Sylhet, where I lived from my sixth to my sixteenth year. During these years I rarely went home to Poil except during the annual Durga Puja holidays, when the whole family went to our home for the celebration of the Pujas. The Puja vacation extended then, as now, for a little over a month, from the new-moon day of the Bengalee month of Aswin to the new-moon day of Kartik, both days inclusive. This was the annual vacation for our civil courts; and in my school days the schools in Bengal also closed with these courts. We had no summer vacation at that time, and only a couple of days for Christmas and another day for the English new year. Even the Mahomedan holidays were much fewer than now. Most of our holidays, whether for the courts or for the schools, were Hindu holidays, and of these the Durga Puja holidays were the longest and the most important.

My father paid his annual visit to his village home during the Puja holidays. His court used to close then, as this is closed even now on the last day of what is known among Bengalee Hindus as the *Pitri-Paksha*, or the fortnight dedicated to the recollection of the *pitris* or the ancestors. Throughout this fortnight every Hindu householder takes a ceremonial bath in tanks or rivers, as the case may be, early in the morning and standing breast-deep in

the water, offers oblations of water with both of his hands to his forbears, naming each one and remembering his relationship to him or her. This is done from the first day of the dark quarter of the month of Aswin to the following new-moon day, when he performs a *shradh* and makes regular offerings of cakes to the dead and of food and clothes and cash to the presiding priest and other Brahmins. This closes the *Pitri-Paksha*. And the *Devi-Paksha* or the fortnight dedicated to the Devi or the Goddess Durga starts with the next morning. On the sixth day of this bright moon the real *puja* of Durga begins and is continued for the next three days, closing on the fourth with the immersion of the image or the symbolic earthen water pot, in the afternoon or the evening of that day.

We had, like most well-to-do Hindu families, the Durga Puja in our house. It was the most joyous time of the year to us all. And we boys used to look forward to the Puja season with great and gladdening expectancy. The first rays of the autumn sun, after Nature had been washed by the continuous downpour of the previous two or three months, had a peculiar brightness and softness in it. Every morning, from the middle of September, and sometimes from even earlier than this, used to bring to our boyish fancy some sign of beauty or some secret tiding of great hope and joy. The sky was getting more and more cloudless; the heavens brightening up with its hosts of glittering stars, shining like diamond out of the azure vault; the nights commencing to be brighter and brighter, and the mornings cool and fragrant with the scent of the autumn flowers; the land looking fresh and purer; the waters throbbing with the fullness of life; rivers running up to the very brim; vast expanses of watery wastes, in which our district abounds, dancing sometimes in subdued passion in ripples and sometimes rising in fairly high waves at the lash of the autumn gale—whole Nature carried to our boyish imagination a new sense of joy and a new perception of beauty in land and water, on earth and sky. This was the Durga Puja season in our boyish days, when to our boyish imagination Nature seemed to beat in joyous expectation of the great Pujas.

Sometimes we used to go home a day or two before the holidays commenced, so that my father might perform the new moon day rites in memory of his ancestors in our village home; but more often we used to start for our home the day after the holidays commenced. But whenever we left for home, the previous week, if not the previous fortnight, used to be spent by us in feverish excitement, making purchases for the Pujas. This was the time of the year when I was allowed out shopping with my elders. My father never did any shopping himself. Shopping was not considered quite respectable and dignified in his time. Some of my cousins, particularly my cousin who acted as my father's clerk, used to do all the shopping for our family. In my early school days I was not allowed to go to the bazar on any account whatsoever; whatever I required, whether it was a pen or a pencil or paper or slate or books or clothes, used to be bought for me by one of my older cousins. My father never let me touch a copper, much less go to the bazar for anything, until I was sixteen years of age. But I could go out with my cousins once in the year to the bazar when they went to make the purchases for the Pujas.

There were no railroads in those days in Sylhet, nor was there any steamer communication between our village and the town of Sylhet. There is railway communication now, but no steamer communication between Sylhet and Poil even today. Our only means of transportation during the rainy season was the country boat. We could get a fairly large-sized boat with three men to drive it for between three to five rupees for the whole trip from the town to our village. It took usually from twenty-four to thirty hours, including stoppages for our meals on the way. The roofs of these boats were cut into two parts with an awning or opening in the middle that had a removable cover. This helped to divide the length of the boat into two parts or compartments, the front serving as an outer room for the men and the back, curtained off from it, served as a *zenana*, with bath and w. c. improvised by a bamboo platform abutting out through the opening in the middle of the boat. Generally we got into the boat after an early dinner in the evening and got home some time the following night.

We have no large and tumultuous rivers in Sylhet. Our waterways, during the dry winter months, are narrow streams that rise in the Cachar, the Manipur, the Tippera or Jayantia Hills and flow into some branch or tributary of the Meghna or the Padma, the great river-courses of lower East Bengal. During the rainy season and the autumn months, the entire lowland of the district lies under water, and there is free boat transportation from one place to another across flooded wastes or paddy fields that always leave some margin of unsown land along the boundaries of the sown fields. Then there are small channels or *khals* that serve as drainage canals which, though dried up in the winter and spring, are filled during the rains and provide free passage for country boats. It was a pleasant experience to me passing through growing paddy fields, rich with the promise of the coming harvest, along the vast and weedless expanse of water that gave to my unilluminated imagination the idea of the sea, through shallower water-courses smelling the cool scent of water hyacinths and other water weeds, or by villages half-submerged in water, resounding with the vesper hymns of the devout, or with the ribald songs of the gayer folk late in the night: and all these rendered our annual journey from Sylhet to Poil one of the happiest experiences of my young days.

But the most exciting part of the journey was when we approached our village. It is a rather large village; and as it stands on very lowland, it lies practically under water during the rains and throughout the autumn months. It is divided into a number of *pallis*, or *paras* as we call them, containing a group of dwelling houses. These *paras* are converted into islands during these months. These *paras* are named after the principal families occupying them. Our quarter is known as *Pal-para* or the *para* of the Pals. There was *Sen-para* or the *para* of the Sens. The Pals and the Sens were the oldest among the *bhadraloks* of the village to come and settle here, and were, therefore, counted in those days as the most respectable, taking precedence over the others (except, of course, the Brahmins, who did not come really within the order of precedence among the Kayasthas and Vaidyas) in all social functions. There was a *Deb-para* named after the

Debs, another Kayastha family. The Brahmins lived in what was called the *Paschim-para* or the *West-para*, and there were in this *para* in those days, and are still, two families who are not Brahmins, the Guptas and the Endas, who came and settled in our village long after the Sens and Pals and had not sufficiently multiplied to people a whole *palli* and give it their name. On the outskirts of the village there were the fishermen's quarters, called *Machooa-hatee*, the *Vedia-hatee* or the Gipsy quarters, and the *Mussalman-para* which held the home of a very respectable family of Mahomedan zemindars. In the centre there were also *Teli-hatee* or the oilmen's quarters and the *Bania-hatee* or the quarters of the goldsmiths. The other castes lived mixed up with the rest in these *paras*. These *paras* were divided from one another by ditches or narrow canals that formed, during the rains, the main waterways of the village. Our boat had to steer its course along these waterways that intersected one another; and it was no easy thing for boatmen not familiar with these to direct their boat to its destination, particularly in the darkness of the night.

As we approached our village, the boatmen often times got confused by the intersecting waterways in it, and commenced to cry out for guidance to our landing stage or *ghat*. Our own people were not more familiar with these as they frequently changed from one year to the other. The directions and counter-directions given to the boatmen then commenced to create confusion and mutual protests and even abuse, causing considerable disturbance to the sleeping village, breaking the slumber of the people, who cried out from their beds, where the boat wanted to go and who was the passenger; and then there were cries of recognition and rushing out of beds and exchange of greetings and of friendly enquiries about health and clear directions to the boatmen; all these created a joyful excitement in us all. And when the boat stopped at our *ghat*, there was the auspicious cry of *ulu* from the women, and rushing out with light of the servants and maids, the greetings, the salutations, the questions and answers, and the hurry and bustle of getting on land, and the removal of the

luggage. All these still linger in my mind, after seventy years, as landmarks of a period of life which was among the sweetest I have lived.

My father had no brothers nor any first cousins, except on his mother's side, who, of course, did not belong to his family but had their own home in their own village, though they used to live with us at Sylhet. And as my father practically lived in the town, our home in Poil was in charge of a dependent who formed, with his old mother, his wife and a daughter or two, a part of our own household. His mother was much older than my father and used to call him by his pet-name of Ramdhan. My father called her *didi* or elder sister, and her son, Dagoo by name, used to call my father *mama* or maternal uncle, my mother *mamee* or maternal aunt. I used to address him as *dada* or elder brother, and his wife as *bau-di* or *dada's* wife. Slavery of a kind existed in Bengal at the time of my grandfather, and was not altogether unknown even in my father's earlier days. I think Dagoo's mother had been bought by my grandfather for a small sum; or it might be that she was herself the daughter of some bond-slave of my ancestors. But though not of our flesh and blood, Dagoo was as much a rightful member of my father's family as myself. He was the master of our house in Poil during ten to eleven months in year, and employed and worked the labourers and domestics required for the upkeep of the house. He responded to all the social invitations of the village as well as those from our friends and relations in the countryside on my father's behalf and as his representative. The tenants looked upon my father as their nominal landlord, while they regarded Dagoo as their real master, and uniformly treated him with the consideration due to his position as such. He collected all the rents and spent whatever was necessary for the upkeep of the house or for other purposes himself, with as much freedom as if he was the master of the house and all its property, rendering a rough account of his stewardship to my father when he went home for the Pujas.

How my father's tenantry looked upon this 'retainer' of my father was brought home to me once when I was passing through his estate on my way from Poil to Sylhet in the summer of 1875,

after I had left school and had joined the university in Calcutta. It was my summer vacation, and hearing that my parents were staying in Poil, I went from Calcutta to our village to meet them. But they had left Poil for Sylhet before I arrived; and I was going by boat to Sylhet with Dagoo (whom I always called *Dada*), a servant and a couple of Mahomedan *payiks* or peons employed in my father's zemindary. There was a large dairy farm on the bank of the river in my father's estate and as it is usual for these tenants to make presents of their best dairy products to the landlord if he happens to pass by, one of our Mahomedan peons went up to the owner of the dairy and asked for some cream and curd for me. The man wanted to be paid for his things, but as this was refused, he also refused he part with them. The peon came and reported it to us; and then *Dada* went up to the river bank, and called out to the milkman in an angry tone. He came at once with due humility and, when asked why he had refused to give the things wanted, he replied: "How could I know, Dagoo *Dada*, that you had sent for the things? The *payik* came and told me that these were wanted for Bipin Babu, I did not know they were for you." At this *Dada* introduced me to the dairy-man, and the dispute was settled to the satisfaction of all parties. But this revealed to me the position that *Dada*, though a mere retainer or the son-of a so-called slave girl, had acquired in our household and among my father's tenants.

Dagoo was for a few days with us at Koterhat when I was a little child of four or five. And I remember that he had a bad attack of cholera and was in a state of collapse for many hours, hovering between life and death, and how my father nursed him almost day and night, and how I was taken to have what they then thought was my last look of him, and how my mother, prevented by cruel custom from going out to attend his sickbed which was in the outer or men's quarters, wept incessantly throughout the time he was ill, as if he was her own flesh and blood! His wife was treated by my parents as a daughter-in-law and had everything almost that my younger sister had. When *Dada* had children, two daughters, they were tended and brought up almost as my sister, and my father looked upon them as his

own, and could not rest contented until they were duly married. Dagoo came to Calcutta in 1883 with my sister on his way to Gaya. I was then a disinherited and excommunicated son of my father. Dagoo walked about the vast wilderness of this city in search of me, longing to see me once again. But he found no trace of me and going to Gaya died there of cholera. My sister on her way back managed to discover my whereabouts, and coming to see my wife and child, told me the story of *Dada's* fruitless search of me, and how he died with my name on his lips, saying that there was one unfulfilled wish which he was leaving this side, and that was that he could not see me once before he died!

Our home at Poil was a group of huts, built of bamboo and wooden posts with the walls of a kind of straight reed called *shar* in our vernacular, that grew in abundance in our parts and the roof made of meadow grass supported by bamboo rafters. It stood upon two or three acres of land, including two tanks or water reservoirs of a fairly large size, one in front of the house and the other at the back, reserved for the use of the ladies and protected from the public eye by high bamboo walls, and the houses of retainers and tenants stood on the bank of the outer tank. It was divided into two parts, the outer and the inner. The outer part consisted of a *Chandi-Mandap* or the house of the Goddess Chandi, which is another name for Durga, where the image of the Goddess used to be set up every year during the Durga Puja, and where the other Pujas also used to be performed. In front of this *Chandi-Mandap* there was a big shed, with eight triangular roofs and therefore called an *at-chala*, which could accommodate from two to three hundred people, all squatting on the floor. It had no wall, and was used as the music hall during the Pujas and as general reception hall on other festive occasions. To the east of this shed stood a long hut divided into two or three rooms, that combined both kitchen and dining room for our Brahmin guests, when we had any, and where sometimes such of our friends or relations before whom my mother and other ladies of the house could not or would not freely move about used to be accommodated when they came to visit us. To the

south of the open hall was another hut, that opened on the north to the outer or men's quarters and on the south to the inner courtyard where the ladies reigned. This was the living and bedroom of the younger folk for me, when I grew up and assigned a separate bed and bedroom for myself; and my cousins and uncles used to occupy it whenever we were at home in Poil. The inner or the ladies part of the house also had three or four huts, besides kitchen and cowshed. At the back of the ladies' quarters was the ladies tank, and a fairly big compound on which vegetables used to be grown for the kitchen. A public road, or lane strictly speaking, ran between the *Chandi-Mandap* and the outer tank which had a brick bathing *ghat* or platform. Some tenants were settled on the northern and western banks of the tank, and another lived inside our own compound, who belonged to the class to which Dagoo belonged and were related to him. The other branches of our family lived in this *para*, which was therefore called *Pal-para*. And they too had their own retainers living about them. There were also one or two families who, though belonging to the servant class, called 'Singh' in our parts, occupied a higher social status than our retainers, and who never inter-married with them. There were a few families of *Malis* or so-called untouchables of the scavenger group in this *para*, who were our dependants and had their land and homestead free of rent in consideration of the service which they were expected to render us in sweeping our yards and compounds and generally keeping the *para* clean. The other *paras* were also of this type.

And looking back upon the social life of our village, as it was sixty years ago, it is brone in upon me that in spite of our caste exclusiveness and the restrictions that obtained in the matter of eating and drinking between the touchables and the so-called untouchables, and the honour that used to be paid to the so-called higher or *Bhadralok* classes by the so-called lower or common people, there was a far more real and powerful spirit of democracy of a kind in our rural life than what strikes the eye today. There was a clear distinction between the obligations of caste and the obligations of the social life. For instance, no one in the village, however low his place in the scale of caste, would

come and take his food in the house of the highest caste people, Brahmin or Kayastha or Vaidya, unless he was properly invited and properly received and served. He did not want to dine under the same roof or in the same line with the so-called caste people, but he claimed—and enforced this claim when occasion called for it—in other respects the same honour which was due from a host to his guest. He had to be served by the host or someone of his family, or some near relation who could legitimately represent him. In the house of a *Bhadralok*, no untouchable *Mali* would accept food served by another *Mali* or by a servant of the host, but it had to be served by a *Bhadralok*. This was a point of honour with them. The Singhs or the servant caste equally stood upon their own rights and dignities and would not touch food in our house on any ceremonial occasion or at any social function, unless it was served by us. And, I think, the same rule obtained in the house of Brahmins also. Every class or caste had their own seats assigned on all ceremonial gatherings and were equally served with *pan* or betel leaves and areca nuts and the tobacco pipe or the *hookka*, the different castes having their own *hookkas*.

Indeed, our caste prejudices did not seem, in those days particularly in our village life, to interfere in any way with the freedom of our social intercourse. Our old ideas of this social intercourse were different. They did not mean what is called inter-dining among members of the different castes. The non-Brahmin never felt hurt because the Brahmin could not take his food out of his hands; nor the Brahmin looked upon this thing as in any way a proof and sign of his social superiority. People used to take these restrictions as matters of course, which did not indicate any real personal superiority or inferiority. In Bengal, at least, we have no memories of any time in our social history when the Brahmin and the so-called untouchable did not freely mix with each other except only in the matter of eating and drinking. The untouchable Chandala used to address the highest Brahmin as brother or uncle and was similarly addressed by the Brahmin himself. These social honours used to go neither by birth nor by riches nor rank, but uniformly by age alone. And as

no one could claim any credit for himself for having come to the world earlier than others, the order of social precedence or regard based upon age seemed to preserve the spirit of equality and democracy in the midst of the inevitable differences in learning or wealth or rank or even birth and parentage.

Our poorest and so-called untouchable neighbours were never excluded from any social function in our house. They used to come and sit on mats reserved for them in my father's house alongside of the so-called higher castes, and used to freely take part in their conversation. And my father also used to go to their house every now and then, particularly if there was any illness or function there, only he was given a separate seat from the people of their own caste. The very wide intellectual and moral chasm that our modern English education has created between the classes and the masses was absolutely unknown in my young days, particularly in our village.

We had a *tol* or Sanskrit seminary in our village in those days presided over by a learned Pandit who had received the title of *Vidyalkara*. He was in some sense the leader of our village society. He interpreted the ceremonial law of the Hindus to our people, Brahmin or Kayastha or Vaidya. His house was open to all classes and conditions of people of the village, including those that were called untouchables. People used to go there at all times of the day, even when he was engaged in teaching his pupils. And in the interval of his discussions or expositions of the subtle points of grammar or logic or complex questions of Hindu ceremonial law, the amiable *Vidyalkara* could make time to exchange a few kindly words with these people, who often times simply sat and listened to his talk to his pupils which, of course, they could not really follow; but all the same they spent some part of their time in an atmosphere of refinement and culture. It was this subtle atmosphere of good manners and noble thoughts and pure sentiments, in which our ignorant and unlettered people lived in our villages, that contributed to their higher humanity. All our liberal education notwithstanding, I am afraid, we have not been able to create or keep up this helpful atmosphere in the present social environment of our people! The most orthodox of

our Brahmins were rigidly sanctimonious and exclusive in their religious rites and practices and in their eating and drinking only; but in the other affairs of their life they were generally as free from exclusiveness as the most democratic among us, English-educated people.

The community in our village was, as has already been said, a very mixed one. We had not only almost every important Hindu caste but a fairly large Mahomedan population also. And the intercourse between the Hindus and the Mahomedans was almost as free and friendly as that among the different Hindu castes themselves. In my father's house we used to invite our Mahomedan neighbour, the zemindar, to all our domestic functions, except the Pujas, which they could not attend, though there was regular exchange of presents between us during the Mahomedan festival of Id as well as on occasions of marriage or death. This Mahomedan neighbour, I still remember, used to send a piece of cloth and a couple of rupees whenever there ~~was~~ any *shradh* or after-death ceremony in our house; and we ~~used~~ to return these to them on similar occasions. We were ~~permitted~~ to catch fish from their tanks on every festive occasion in ~~our~~ house as they were allowed free use of our fish preserve for ~~their~~ own purpose on festive occasions in their own house. In these ~~matters~~ no manner of distinction was made between our Hindu and our Mahomedan neighbours. And the general Moslem population of the village was treated similarly and practically on the same footing of social equality, within the limitations that caste and religion imposed, as the Hindu peasantry used to be treated. Our differences in religious faiths and practices made not the slightest difference in these social amenities and relations. There was perfect toleration of one another among members of both the communities.

There were neither carriages nor even bullock carts in our parts in my school days. Everybody, including the ladies, therefore had generally to walk from house to house on festive occasions, whether religious or social, unless occasionally palanquins or lighter *doolies* were requisitioned for going from one part of the village to another somewhat distant part. The boat was used for this purpose in our village during the rains when the country was

under water. But in our own *para* my mother and the other ladies of our family and class used to go about freely, just standing by the roadside with their back turned to any stranger, who might by chance be met on the road, to let him pass. And though there was some sort of *zenana* seclusion, it did not materially affect the freedom of movement or social intercourse between the sexes.

We had a Vaishnava temple or *akhara* in our village. It stood very close to our home and was originally endowed, I think, by our family. It was not a very old institution. I heard that at one time we had our own family deity or the symbol of *Narayana* in our own house and our family priest used to come and attend to his worship twice every day. But when there was no one living from year's end to year's end in our village home, the worship of the God came to be neglected; and it was thought advisable to transfer the image or symbol of the deity to some shrine and to place it in charge of some people whose vocation it would be to tend and worship it. There were other images and symbols in other homes also belonging to our clan, and these also went to this *akhara* to be tended by the Vaishnava Mahanta there who must have brought his own images also. For, in my early days, there was quite a goodly collection of these in this *akhara*. And I remember to have heard it from the elders that this *akhara* was endowed by our people with lands sufficient in those days to pay for the upkeep of the institution.

An old *mahanta* was the head of this *akhara* in my young days; and he had at that time, I think, about a couple of assistants or disciples and two or three females of the Vaishnava mendicant class. There are two kinds of Vaishnavas, the householder and the mendicant. The householders, again, are of two classes. One class follows the rules of the Hindu *smritis*, like those, for instance, of Manu and Parasara; while the other class follows the social law as given out by Shree Chaitanya or his friend and premier apostle, Nityananda. These latter Vaishnavas, though householders, do not really observe the rules of caste but form a new caste by themselves. The mendicant Vaishnavas take the vow of celibacy and poverty like the other religious mendicants of India and take up the staff and the bowl and affect the loin

cloth or *kaupin* of the general body of our Sannyasins; and though they do not take forbidden food or things cooked by low-caste householders, and frequently even by Brahmin householders, they do not acknowledge their birth or caste or family or home. I cannot say to what caste the old Mahanta in our village *akhara* originally belonged; and as these Vaishnava mendicants, unlike those of the other orthodox Hindu *sannyasins*, generally come from the lower castes of Bengalee society, and as the female mendicants were too often the mistresses of the *mahantas* or other Vaishnavas, these people did not receive that social honour to which their order and vocation fairly entitled them. And it sounds curious, but nonetheless it is true, that though our family deity, *Narayana*, used to be brought to our house from this *akhara* for every domestic function as well as during the Durga Puja, the men who performed the daily worship of the Deity had no share in these ceremonial worships in our own house. Our family priest had to fetch the *Narayana* from the *Akhara*, and had to purify it by administering the sacramental compound known as *panchagabya* or of the five products of the cow, and then worship it in due form. Indeed, my father never took food cooked or touched by the *mahanta* or his assistants; nor would my mother receive the Vaishnaves of our *akhara* into her living room, but she used always to receive them in the outer verandah.

This *akhara* was a very useful centre of the social life of our village in those days. It combined the functions of both poor house and rest house of the village. Whoever had nothing to eat or a hole to lay his head in at night, had simply to walk to this *akhara* during the mid-day *puja* and offering of cooked food to the deities here, to have a free meal, and any decent person could find shelter in the open shed or the music hall of the temple that stood just in front of the thrones of the images, for as many nights as he wanted to stay there. All the Vaishnava feasts and festivals *Dol-Yatra*, *Jhoolan-Yatra*, *Ratha-Yatra*, *Rash-Yatra*, all these used to be held here with due pomp and circumstance, with feasting and music parties and other amusements, in which the whole village took part. Besides these, there used to be *keertans* every evening before the gods, and not only the devout

elders but even youngsters, to whom the mere sound of *mridanga* and cymbals and conch-shell made a powerful appeal, used to gather here to pass a pleasant hour of the evening. Sometimes the *mahanta* used to read on an afternoon from some Vaishnavic scripture, the *Bhagavata* or the *Chaitanya Charitamrita*, which was in Bengalee; and people, with nothing else doing or going in the village, used to assemble here to listen to these readings. More frequently the gossips of the village gathered here to spend their idle hours in the afternoon in idle talk or in dealing out local scandals. We had neither public houses nor many people, perhaps not a single person, given to drinking spirituous liquors; but the social purposes, which 'pubs' perform in England and America, used to be more than fully met by this *akhara* in our village. It had very little real religious value to the generality of our village population but it had an undoubted social value.

The present system of primary education was introduced in Bengal in the seventies of the last century. Before this, however, we had our own elementary schools both for the Mahomedans and the Hindus of the higher or literary classes. We had, I think, some of these schools in our village also. There was a teacher or *guru-mahashaya* in our *para* who held his classes, in my early boyhood, in our own house, and little boys came here every morning and afternoon to learn their alphabets, elementary arithmetic and mensuration and practise Bengalee caligraphy under him. They used to squat on the ground and having learnt to trace the alphabets on the ground, used first to write words and sentences on fresh banana leaves; and after they had sufficiently advanced in this art, and when they could be trusted to write out things with a certain measure of accuracy and their hand had become steady, they wrote out their lessons on dry palmyra leaves. Every boy when he was allowed to write on palmyra leaves considered himself quite learned and carried himself with a certain degree of conscious superiority over his fellows. No regular fees were charged by the *guru-mahashaya* but he received a little cash either monthly or annually from the more well-to-do people of the village, while the boys themselves made some payments in kind, in the form of rice from their

homes or the vegetables of the seasons from their gardens every now and then. There was a *moulavi* also to whom the boys of the higher classes of Mahomedans used to go for elementary lessons in Arabic and Persian. Before my time, when my father was a boy, boys of many a respectable Hindu family, who looked forward to employment under the government, also went to the *moulavi* and had their training and education there. This Moslem school used to be held in the house of the Mahomedan zemindar in our village and, I think, the *moulavi* was attached to their family mosque also.

Though copper and silver coins had already come into vogue in my young days even in our villages, cowrie shells were still current, to some extent, as token values among our people. Barter was still the general practice in local trade. There were cotton plants in almost every homestead, and the spinning wheel was found in almost every house. The widows, particularly of the so-called *Bhadrolok* classes, used to ply these wheels in their leisure hours, and the yarns thus produced by them were exchanged for cloth by the weavers in the neighbourhood. Family was the unit of our social system. Almost every family had its own culturable land, either owned and held by them as freehold or on lease from the zemindar of the village; and agriculture was the universal occupation of the rural populations. They drew their main subsistence from land with the labour of their own hands and plied whatever other professions they pursued, more or less during their leisure hours. This gave the artisans an amount of freedom which contributed both to the perfection of their art and the preservation of the basal elements of their humanity. And in the disposal of their art produce they frequently followed the method of barter. Not only artisans but others who produced the necessities of our village life usually followed this practice. The oil man pressed oil for his neighbours in exchange for the mustard seed grown by them on their fields. The carpenter exchanged the contrivance used for pressing oil for oil from the oilman. The milkman exchanged *ghee* and curd for the produce of his neighbours. So on and so forth. The ordinary economic life of the village was conducted upon barter in those days. Even the

landlord not infrequently received his rent in kind instead of, as now, in cash. And though people had few luxuries and little cash in their house, life was much easier and pleasanter, with much less of storm and stress and the inevitable wear and tear of a competitive economic system than it is today.

Much less money was in circulation in our villages, indeed in the whole country, then—sixty or seventy years ago—than now. But though judged by cash or money accumulation, people were much poorer than they seem to be today, they had enough to eat and enjoyed their simple life much more than we are able to do. A lakh of rupees seemed to our boyish imagination sixty years back as quite a fabulous sum; while today one hears accounts, almost at every turn of trade or land, of transactions covering many lakhs. And this very scarcity of huge cash kept down the value of money to its natural level in my younger days. Money could buy land or horses and build palaces and secure gold and diamond ornaments or fine household furniture; but it could not buy social distinction in the way and to the extent that it does at the present time. Wealth was, no doubt, a power of a kind then as it is now. But its power and potency depended entirely upon how it was used and not at all simply upon its existence in the hands of its owner. No one was permitted to gain any social advantage over those who were otherwise his equals or superiors simply because he could command large cash or credit.

In fact, money had little social value in those days, particularly in our villages. Social honour went generally by caste; and in those rare instances where caste considerations did not enter, as in the case of men with saintly character and reputation, it used to be regulated by what may be called moral and spiritual values. Wealth made no difference among men of the same castes; and the poor man with greater family prestige or higher social connections, within the caste rules, had precedence always of the richer men in the community. Indeed, people openly resented any display of wealth by the richer members of their caste, especially outside those who are called *Bhadraloks*.

A very significant story in elucidation of this fact was current in our neighbourhood during my young days. We had a very rich zemindar or landlord in a neighbouring village who came of a lower caste. Once he had invited his caste-people to a feast in his house. He made great preparations for the dinner and brought out all his bell-metal platters and cups and glasses, such as are usually used in the house of Brahmins, Kayasthas and Vaidyas, or the so-called *Bhadraloks*, for his guests. His idea was, of course, to honour them in this way. But when his guests saw all these things, they refused to sit down to their meals. The host was very much perplexed by their attitude. They went and stood silently at the door of the dining room, where cushions had been arranged for their seats, and plates and glasses had been set for their use. After repeated questions, the oldest among them, who had led his fellows, said in ill-concealed anger: "Have you invited us to your house to insult us?" The host fell from the ~~skies~~ at this charge and humbly begged the pardon, if unwittingly he ~~had~~ done anything wrong, and wanted to know what his offence was. "Your offence?" cried the old man, "Don't you know that we ~~cannot~~ entertain you in this way when we ask you to our house. We ~~are~~ poor, we have neither plates nor glasses nor carpet in our ~~house~~. Have you invited us to insult us by this display of your riches? We won't touch food in your house unless you can serve us exactly in the same way as we are able to entertain you when you come to us." At this all the plates and glasses and cushions had to be removed, plain banana leaves had to be brought and set, and it was then that these poor people would agree to accept the hospitality of their rich caste-man.

Chapter 7

EARLY RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENTS AND EDUCATION



The cry of 'religious instruction' as an essential element in the education of the young had not been raised in the days of my early youth. My father never received any 'instruction' in religion, such as is wanted and, in some instances, being actually attempted to be imparted today in some of our schools. Teaching of doctrine or dogma and inculcation of ethical ideas and principles are the objects of 'religious instructions'. But our people never troubled themselves over questions of doctrines or dogmas; nor learnt their ethics from the Decalogue. They usually accepted their beliefs from their forbears and followed the rule of life to which they had been used from generation to generation. Yet, it would not be fair to think that their children received no manner of religious or ethical training at all. To do so would be to ignore the fact that there may be very superior and effective religious and moral training without the help of church catechisms and school textbooks.

I have no knowledge of the inner history and psychology of the evolution of my father's personal faith. He had received his education in Persian; and though I do not think that the theological speculations of Islamic culture were studied by him, yet it is hardly possible that he did not come across, in the course of his readings in Persian, Moslem religious books, inculcating the severe monotheism of Islam and condemning the worship of 'stocks and stones'. But the Hindu too is a monotheist. He never believes in

a multiplicity of gods. There is only One God, the One Brahman 'without a second'. The various gods and goddesses of popular Hindu ceremonialism are really not so many different and independent Supreme Beings, but only powers and instruments of the One Supreme Deity for the governance of His world. I used sometimes to hear all these from my father, in course of his talks with his friends or visitors. And this faith did not necessarily contradict the monotheism of Islam, which he found inculcated in Moslem literature. Indeed, my father was something of a rationalist himself; and I heard him openly refusing to accept many a popular Hindu belief as true. For instance, he never accepted the Pauranic theory of earthquakes. He frankly declared many a time to pious Brahmins, that he did not believe that this earth of ours was supported on the hood of a serpent that rested on the back of a tortoise, floating on the waters of the ocean whence this world has come into being.

I have no idea of the psychology of the child-mind in Christendom in regard to religion. But I remember that, as a child, I became conscious of religion as something that stood somewhat apart from my ordinary life. This consciousness must have come to me from the rites and rituals in our house. In the first place, though I was not taught or called upon to worship or pray, I saw this that I was not permitted to touch my father when he sat down to his *puja*, nor the things that were used by him for his daily worship. I could not go near the priest when he came to perform any religious ceremony in our house, though at other times he used to take me on his lap as he smoked his *hookka*. Even my mother, on her fast days, would keep herself aloof from us and would not touch food or drink until the *puja* was finished; and even then she would not take her usual food, but live for the day only on fruits or sweets and milk or home-made curd. During the Durga Pujas in our home at Poil we were allowed to enter the Puja-house before the ritual commenced and sit by the artist who was moulding the figures of the gods and goddesses and touch them. But from the morning of the Puja-day, when the priest came and started the ceremonial, we were not allowed to cross the threshold of the Puja-house. This prohibition was

extended also to our elders, and even to Brahmins not engaged for the worship of the goddess; the priest himself had to live during the three Puja-days according to certain rules that prohibited the pursuit of his usual mode of life, enjoining vegetarian food and other rules of personal holiness. And all these things created an impression upon my child-mind that religion was essentially something apart from our ordinary, natural life. It stood aside from the usual work and enjoyment of life. And in this way, I think, there grew up in me, quite unconsciously to myself and without any teaching or instruction, some sort of an impression that there was a world beyond this world of ours, a world that we could not see with our eyes nor reach with any of the other senses, which was peopled by unseen beings very much like ourselves but infinitely more powerful, who controlled our life and happiness and held power of life and death over humans. I did not reason and analyse the thing in this way but looking back upon my early memories I feel that this must have been the way that my boyish faith grew up quite unconsciously to myself.

But though I never had any regular instructions in religion in my young days, I had some religious training through what may be called 'playing at religion'. When I was hardly five, my father bought for me a toy set of the copper things—water-vessel and spoon, lamp-stand tripod and plate, and a small cup for sandal paste—which were used by him in his daily *puja*. And I remember how I used to sit quietly near him with these things pretending to worship like him a Nameless and Invisible Being. When I grew up, and particularly when I was at home in Poil, I used to join the village boys in organising imitation *pujas* among ourselves, building toy *puja mandaps* for the purpose, setting up small images, often times made out of soft clay, gathered from our tanks with our own hands, making offerings of soaked rice and fruits and other things to these gods, and invariably sacrificing plantain stalks, made to represent the sacrificial goats, before these images. Sometimes we used to set up a whole trunk of banana plant with four bamboo legs as a buffalo and sacrifice it to the accompaniment of sacred music made by beating bell-metal plates with ticks. And all these things helped to quicken

and develop the religious sense in us because during these mock *pujas* we used to scrupulously observe the ways of our elders and follow the rules of personal purification enjoined upon the worshippers. Looking back upon these things, it seems that our forefathers followed, without knowing anything about it, the methods of Froebel in building up the religious life of their children.

When I grew up and reached the age of discretion in some sense, that is, from the age of twelve or so, I was allowed some active participation in the duties of these *pujas*, and particularly of the Durga Puja. Flowers and the leaves of the *bael* tree are used in great profusion in this Puja; and the duty of gathering flowers and cleaning the leaves of the *bael* tree was entrusted to the grown-up boys of the house. And there used to be keen competition among the boys of the different houses, where they had the Durga Puja, in the matter of collecting flowers. In most Hindu homesteads they had a few flowering trees or bushes or creepers. The most popular among the flower-trees or bushes were those of the China rose, of various colours—dark red, cream white and light blue. The China rose had no scent, but it was believed to be, particularly the dark red variety, a great favourite of the Goddess; the blue *aparajita*, a thin but sturdy creeper, the flowers of which were also favoured by the Goddess; then there was what is known as *sthala-padma* or 'land-lotus' in Bengalee, with white or pink flowers somewhat of the shape and size of the lotus; the *atasee*, the soft yellow tint of which reflected the colour of the Goddess herself; water-lilies of white and the rarer red variety; and lotuses from far afield, that used to be collected and brought by my father's Hindu tenants—these were the flowers used in the worship of the Goddess. And we used to collect these from our neighbour's homesteads. In my early days, five families in our village had the Durga Puja in full form; that is, they set up the image of the Goddess and her companions and worshipped her for three days with due pomp and circumstance. And there used to be quite a feverish rivalry between us and the boys of these other families in regard to the collection of these flowers. We kept almost half the night awake for this purpose. Stealing flowers from people's gardens or back or front yards was not

viewed as wrong. And we took a peculiar pride in despoiling the flower plants and bushes of these houses where they had the great Puja themselves. So a double task devolved upon us during the three Puja nights, namely, of protecting our own trees and bushes from our rivals, and despoiling their flowers. We used to get up quietly in the small hours of the morning and taking a lantern went out collecting these flowers, sometimes causing considerable nervousness to our parents, because some of these bushes were said to be visited by venomous snakes during the cool hours of the night, and disturbing the people of the houses where we went in their sleep by our movements in their backyards or along the eaves of their huts.

Early in the morning we had to take our bath and change our clothes, and putting on a fresh-washed *dhoti*, we boys were put to washing the *bael* leaves, quite a heap of which was used in the worship of the Goddess. This had to be done with great care, so that every leaf was washed and cleansed of all dust and other obnoxious things, particularly cobwebs that generally covered them. We were not permitted to talk aloud, lest particles of saliva should fall on the leaves, much less to sneeze or cough, while engaged in this holy work. Nor were we allowed to leave our place until the work was finished, and if ever we did so, we could not come back and resume the work again unless duly purified. All these things gave us some training in self-denial and discipline, which are essential to the truly religious or ethical life and culture.

Then, the music of the Puja, the chanting of the *mantrams*, the sonorous recitations from the 'Chandee', the chapters of the *Markandeya Purana* which describe the exploits of the Goddess and how she killed the demons Shoombha and Nishoombha, and particularly, the *stotra* or hymn in her praise, all these had a weird effect upon the youthful mind. I did not understand the meaning of most of the *mantrams*, nor was I able to follow fully the recitations from the 'Chandee'; but this did not seriously interfere with my enjoyment of these. It was something like the enjoyment of wordless tune, such as is sung on some musical instrument like the violin; for instance, or the flute. And, then, the intense excitement of the sacrifices! Goats only were sacrificed

in our house, as a rule. I had then no sense of the cruelty of the thing. No tender feelings for the poor dumb animal that, when forced down into the sacrificial altar, used to look up to its tormentors with such pitiful gaze, with tears trickling down from the corners of its eyes, touched me then. The one thought that possessed my whole being, body and soul, was how to get through the function without a hitch; for I had heard it that if the head of the animal was not severed at one stroke of the big knife, it meant that there was some flaw in the Puja, some unpardonable offence committed against the dignity of the great Divinity, for which she was offended, and therefore refused to accept the sacrifice. This portended serious calamity to the family of the worshipper. And this fear so possessed our souls during these sacrifices that there was literally no room whatever at the time for any other thought or sentiment in us. And as the music of the sacrifice started simultaneously from drums and *kansis* and conch-shells, *kansars* and bells and the assembled people cried out 'Ma! Ma!', with great fear and devotion, tears flowing from their eyes and their throats half-choked with emotion, a kind of exhilaration, running even to ecstasy, possessed us all. Looking back upon these early experiences, I cannot help feeling that though the outer occasion and material environments were different, the mental afflatus of some of our refined and intellectually purer forms of religious exercises, the *keertans* during the Brahmo Samaj or Arya Samaj *utsavs* or the so-called 'revival meetings' of the Christian denominations, is more or less the same as that of the Hindu sacrifices. And I am not at all sure that these early experiences did not help me very materially, later in life, to understand and enjoy the deeper and more rational emotional exercises and experiences of the worship of God 'in spirit'.

The images of the gods and goddesses too had a profound influence upon me. The colour and contour of these images appealed powerfully to my dawning art-sense. I did not analyse the feeling. I was too young and unenlightened to understand the realism and romance of the ten-handed, full-breasted, three-eyed figure of clay that was worshipped by my people as the Mother;

but I loved it all the same with a deep-rooted love, and longed to look at it for hours and hours without weariness or satiation. To my young imagination it was really no lifeless figure of clay, but something made, for the time that it was being worshipped, of real flesh and blood. To me during the three days of the Puja, this image was a live thing, and the well-shaped face of the Goddess seemed to beam with love and joy, as at eventide we lighted rows of lamps in front of her shrine the glow of which, dancing before the evening breeze, threw a weird glare upon her form and face which, seen through the haze of the incense that went up in white clouds from the huge censers in front of her, seemed to play with all the tender pity and sympathy of Mother-Love. And on the eve of the fourth day, the Bijaya day, when the Goddess was bidden farewell with the prayer that she might return at the end of the year to her devotee's home, I actually believed that all the gladness that brightened the face of the *Devi* during the previous three days had gone out of it, and she was weeping unseen tears at the coming separation from her children. These were not fancies, but stern realities to my young mind. It was, I now know, only the projection of my own sentiments upon the face of the image. The experience was entirely subjective. But all the same it offered a very helpful ground for the quickening and exercise of that imagination which constituted the soul of the difference between theology or philosophy and religion. Looking back upon these early experiences, I realise it that the soul of our so-called image-worship is, seen through the prism of rational analysis and judgment, really worship of the Nameless and Formless Ultimate Reality through the art-sense of man. And I cannot ignore the help that these so-called superstitions forms and ceremonies rendered to whatever religious life it has been my good fortune to have. Without these early exercises and training I might have got more or less of theology or philosophy, and perhaps some moral principles also, but very little real religion.

Our *pujas* are, however, a good deal more than either ritualism or region or even art; they are, or were, in the days of my youth, great social institutions. The Durga Puja specially was

a great social event. For four days there was continuous feeding of guests of all classes and ranks. Even Mahomedans were invited to these feasts. They would not take cooked food in our house, particularly during these *pujas*; but came in hundreds from my father's estate, with presents of vegetables and banana leaves on which the guests were served, and were treated to parched rice and curd and jaggery and sweets, served in earthen bowls, called *malsha* in our vernacular. The lower castes of Hindus, the so-called untouchables, had to be personally invited by a representative of my father, and they were treated to cooked food—rice and *dal* and vegetable, fish, curd and sweets. And when I grew up, I had often times to serve them myself, while my father came and stood by the place, personally supervising this hospitality, with almost the same sense of sanctity and humility with which he used to look to his Brahmin guests. In his social philosophy a guest was the very personification of the Deity, whatever might be his caste or social standing.

But while I enjoyed these great festivals from various points of view, I commenced to lose my fear of the displeasure of the gods from my young days. There were some festival or other, the worship of some god or goddess, almost every week in every Hindu household in those days. In the month of *Vaishakh*, the first month of the Bengalee year, my mother used to have *puja* every week. In the month of *Magh*, corresponding to January-February of the English calendar, the ladies of our house used to dedicate every Sunday to the sun. They bathed before dawn, and used to stand the whole day in the sun, and the rule was that they must keep their faces turned towards this great god all day long, as the sunflowers are reputed to do. They could not touch food or drink the whole day through. At the end of the month, on the last day of it, there was a regular *puja* performed by the priest, when we used to have a small feast. This *puja* was meant for the especial benefit of my sister, who had to join in all the rites and disciplines of it, and the prayer sent up to the great Sun-God throughout the whole of these Sundays was for a good and noble husband for her.

Then, there was the worship of the Goddess Mangal-Chandee, which was performed by my mother during certain Tuesdays, and the prayer to this goddess was for the well-being of her children and all others who were the objects of her mother-love. Packets of green leaves of grass in their stalks and grains of paddy, with a little vermilion, covered by the leaves of the jackfruit, folded in the shape of a triangle, pinned up by means of a thin bamboo piece, were a favourite offering made to this goddess; and these packets used to be preserved with great care, and one of these used to be tied up in a corner of our cloth or sash, as a talisman whenever we left our home on some long journey.

My father, like all Hindus of his generation, was a believer in astrology. And faith in astrology to the Hindu meant in those days not merely acceptance of the truth of the calculations which astrologers were credited with making regarding a man's past or future from an examination of the position and movements of the planets, but in the personality of these planets, who could therefore be propitiated by prayers and offerings according to prescribed formulas and rituals. The worship of the planets was therefore, part of the old and orthodox Hindu belief in astrology. We had every Saturday the worship of Shani or Saturn. A Brahmin used to come every Saturday evening to perform this *puja*. The offerings to Shani consisted of soaked raw rice, milk, sugar, ripe bananas and other luscious fruits of the season. Sometimes, instead of raw rice, wheat or cornflour also was used as the basis, so to say, of this offering. And we boys used to relish the 'leavings' of Shani very much.

An incident in connection with this weekly worship of the planet Shani or Saturn still lives very vivid in my mind. My mother was not then with my father at Sylhet. We were living by ourselves, my father and my cousins and other boys and the male servants, in the town house. Now Mondays and Fridays were the two great marketing days in Sylhet at that time as they are perhaps even today. On these days people from distant villages used to bring their produce, rice and vegetable and fruits and fuels also, besides fish and animals for food or sacrifice, to the town in large quantities; and the residents of the town used to buy their necessities on

these days and store them for use until the next market-day. Fruits, specially plantains, of which Sylhet produces a large and delicious variety, came in large quantities to the town on these two market-days; and it was the usual practice in our house to buy these for the next day's worship of the planet Shani from the market on Fridays. It so happened that one Friday's stack of ripe and juicy plantains, meant for the worship of Saturn or Shani, could not be found the next evening when the Brahmin came for the *puja*. It was the usual practice with my father to personally supervise these preparations, unless some unavoidably pressing business kept him away. He was present when the Brahmin came and set about his preparations for the *puja*; and as he called for the plantains they could not be found. The servant was called and asked to explain where had the fruits gone, or whether he forgot to get these from the market; or what else had become of these, if he had them. After a good deal of fencing under my father's angry cross-examination, he finally blurted out that I must have had them. I was at once sent for. Hardly knowing the fate that awaited me I went to my father. He asked me if I had taken the plantains meant for the worship of Shani; and so far as I remember, without giving me any chance either to confess or deny the charge, he came for me in a violent fit of anger. At this I bolted right off. My father ran after me. Father and son had a race of the whole compound; and at last finding escape impossible, I rushed to the inner or the ladies' quarters in a cousin's house and took shelter in the place where his wife, my sister-in-law, was sitting. Now, according to our social custom, the husband's maternal uncle must not see the face of the wife of his nephew. My father was the maternal uncle of this cousin; so he could not enter the inner apartments of his house. He had therefore, to give up the pursuit, when he found that I had ran to this sanctum. I have no recollection whether I had actually despoiled the fearful God Shani of what had been earmarked for him. But I might have done it, because at the time when this incident occurred I was sufficiently grown up, reading perhaps in the third class of the government school, and before then I had already lost my faith in these restrictions as to eating and drinking.

But this does not mean that I had really lost my belief in Hinduism. I still believed, in a way, in our old gods and goddesses. I had not commenced as yet to reason about these things. But whenever I was in any difficulty I used to pray to Durga and Kali for help and protection. Every morning, I still got up from my bed by reciting a Sanskrit text which rendered into English meant that whoever every morning remembers the two letters, *Dur-ga*, all his dangers disappear like darkness before the rising sun. When going to school, particularly if I had not properly learnt my lessons and feared unpleasant consequences due to this neglect, I used to take my first steps with uttering mentally the name of the goddess. I used to do the same thing whenever there was any illness in the family. I still remember how, during a long spell of very serious illness of my mother when her life seemed to hang as if by a slender thread for three or four weeks, I used to go to every nook and corner of the house, with this unbearable anguish in my heart, and offer up fervent prayers to Durga and Kali for her recovery. This was when I was about the age of fourteen, reading in the third class of the Sylhet Government School.

But even at this time, I had already commenced to rebel against the current social laws and restrictions of Hinduism. I had already lost my faith in caste; and felt no manner of compunction in taking forbidden foods and drinks, whenever any opportunity offered of doing it. So far as I remember, my first inspiration of this heterodoxy came from a Brahmin from Navadvipa. He was a Goswami, traced his descent to one or other of the two great friends and co-adjutors of Shree Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Nityananda and Advaita. He was therefore a spiritual teacher of the Vaishnava denomination. He went to Sylhet, if I remember aright, as a reader of *Bhagavata Purana* and singer of Vaishnava *keertans* or religious lyrics. In this last art he had very considerable proficiency. He happened to put up with a near neighbour of my father, who was also related to us. My older cousins became exceedingly friendly with him, and he used to take his food frequently with them. He did not mind whether the food was cooked by a Brahmin or a non-Brahmin and would take anything that was good. Though the rules of his caste and order did not allow

eating of fish or meat, this fair-looking and genial Vaishnava Brahmin never refused either, whether cooked by his own caste or by our people. Sylhet abounded in those days with wild boars; and the meat of wild boar, though avoided by decent people, was not strictly forbidden. Nobody lost caste through eating it. I remember how one day a cousin of mine procured a loin of this animal and secretly gave it to my mother to cook. My father never touched nor tolerated indulgence in these kinds of meat of doubtful virtue. My mother cooked the meat; but when my cousin wanted a plate of it for this Goswami, she refused to be a party to the killing of the caste of a Brahmin. And I know that my cousin had considerable difficulty in getting a portion of this delicious meat for his Brahmin friend ! He was the first person to disobey the rulers of caste within my knowledge during my school-days. And his example had a great effect upon my own decadent orthodoxy in social matters.

About this time, or more correctly speaking, about a year later, when I was in the second or preparatory class of the Sylhet Government School, a distant relation—some sort of a nephew of mine came to live with us. He had been to Calcutta and had imbibed the freer thoughts and habits of the metropolis. At Calcutta he was used to taking loaf and biscuits prepared by Mahomedans. And he initiated me and other young boys in our house in his unorthodox ways. There were only two ovens in the town of Sylhet in those days where they baked loaves and biscuits. These were also the only place where they made flour. We could not go to these shops without rousing ugly suspicions. So we struck upon a clever ruse. We wanted flour paste to bind our books. And we used to go to these shops ostensibly to buy a copper's worth of flour to make paste with, but really to get hot loaves and biscuits, which we managed to secrete inside our shirts or sashes, and bringing the forbidden things home, we used to go out to the garden after dark, and enjoy these with very mixed feelings indeed.

These secret enjoyments once gave me an exceedingly bad quarter of an hour. It was just before the *pujas*. I had an attack of fever and had been put on liquid diet for about a week. Though

I was then free from fever, my father would not let me have solid food yet. And I was ravenously hungry; I appealed to my nephew from Calcutta to get something from the bakers. At nightfall he went out quietly and brought some hot and crisp biscuits, the very smell and touch of which made my mouth water profusely. But I dared not take these immediately, lest I should be discovered in the act by my father, who was very inquisitive about what we took, especially when we were ill. So I put these away on the top of the mosquito-curtain over my bed and waited for the time when my father would retire to bed and I would find the coast clear for my dinner. Now, my bed was set by a door facing the pond in our outer yard. It was rather a close evening; and my father after taking his meals, took up his hubble-bubble and sat on my bed, and gradually moved up to its very centre, and reclining on my pillow, commenced to enjoy his after-dinner smoke. At the sight of my father in this position, all my wits seemed to leave me. I was in a terrible funk. What would be my fate, if when he had finished his smoking and wanted to go to bed, he should stand up and discover my stock of hot biscuits over his head! I was not hopelessly lacking in mental resources; and taking off my shirt and throwing it on the top of the mosquito-curtain from the other side of the partition that separated my bed from my father's *farash*, I commenced to complain of a feeling of chill and called out to the servants to fetch my shirt. But where could those poor people find it? So I commenced to search for it myself; and after looking a bit here and there, at last I went up to my bed at the back of my father and saying that I had found it on the top of the mosquito-net, rolled up the incriminating things in it and ran out with the bundle to another room, and lay low there until my father had retired, when I and my cousin had our own little forbidden feast.

I do not remember when the wave of religious revolt and reform, started under the leadership of Keshub Chunder Sen, reached our little town. I have a faint recollection of a lecture on Raja Ram Mohan Roy in the Mission School Hall at Nayasharak by a Brahmo missionary from Calcutta which I went to hear. I think he was Upadhyaya Gour Govinda Ray, known at that time

as simply Babu Gour Govinda Ray. But the address did not interest me at all. I had heard of Raja Ram Mohan Roy from my father, who spoke of him as a great *moulavi*. But I was too young to understand anything of his mission and work. This lecture also did not help me to know or understand the Raja better. A few days later, when I think I was reading in the fourth class of the Sylhet Government School, Sita Nath Datta, who has since made his mark as a religious thinker and writer and is well-known among the members and sympathisers of the Brahmo Samaj and others interested in liberal religious thought as Pandit Sita Nath Tattvabhusan, came and joined our class. He belongs to our own district. But as his uncle was living in Calcutta and had a shop of hardware things in Burrabazar, Sita Nath had his early education in the metropolis. One of his cousins, Babu Sree Nath Datta, an old and well-known member of the Church of the New Dispensation had already come under the influence of Keshub Chunder Sen and had publicly joined the Brahmo Samaj. Young Sita Nath was already something of a Brahmo when he came and had his admission in our class in the Sylhet Government School. He became the centre of a Brahmo propaganda among the older students of our school. Sundari Mohan Das, the well-known medical practitioner of Calcutta and Principal of the new National Medical Collage, was a classmate of mine; and he was among the very first to join this new Brahmo movement in Sylhet. Nabin Chandra Shome, who became a leading *mukteer* or criminal lawyer in Sylhet subsequently, was another prominent member of this young Brahmo Samaj. It created some little stir in our small community; especially because of the practical protest which was entered about this time by Sundari Mohan against Hindu ritualism. Sundari Mohan's father held a very high position in Sylhet society. He was the *sheristadar* or head of the collector's office, which was in some respects, a very important post in those days, and was regarded as one of the leaders of the Hindu society of the town. Soon after Sundari Mohan joined the Brahmo Samaj in Sylhet, his father died; and the young reformer refused to perform his *shradh* ceremony according to Hindu rites. It was, however, not absolutely incumbent upon him; for he had an elder

brother, and the real duty of performing the *shradh* fell upon him. So the matter was somehow quietly settled, and though Sundari Mohan did not take any part in the rites, neither he nor his people were put out of caste for his revolt. Only the event created some talk in the community.

I was not drawn to this Brahmo Samaj; but rather took up a somewhat unfriendly attitude towards it. I cannot recall or state my reasons. I do not think I had any reasons at all for this antagonism except that I did not like it. Looking back upon those old recollections, it seems to me that the superior airs which these young reformers gave themselves, the sanctimonious ways which some of them affected, the natural exuberance of youth, characterised by more or less reckless abandon and pursuit of the normally pleasant in preference to that which was said to be good, and which was too much the product of an artificial habit of mind that scented harm and sin in everything or almost everything, which this new moralism openly discouraged and frowningly condemned—all these perhaps set my back up against this new Brahmo Samaj movement in our midst. It was too morose and serious for me, I remember to have attended only one of its prayer meetings; and that finished all chances of my going there again. From that time forward some of us commenced to ridicule the whole business.

But yet we did not stand up in defence of popular and current Hinduism. We had lost our faith completely in it; and our youthful candour did not allow us to defend that which we had actually discarded ourselves. I remember to have taken up not a reactionary, but only a more conservative attitude. I had heard already of Maharshi Debendra Nath Tagore. I had heard that he did not entirely discard Hinduism, but only wanted to reform and reconstruct it. I had heard that Debendra Nath wanted to revive the religion of the ancient Vedas. And I took up this idea of his to fight this new Brahmoism of my comrades. But all this time, though pleading for the ideals of Debendra Nath Tagore, which, truth to say, I knew little and understood still less in those days, as

against the more violent reforms of Keshab Chunder Sen, in my talks and arguments with my class fellows, I participated as before in all the popular rituals and ceremonies in our house, and used sometimes to be moved to send up honest and fervent prayers to Durga and Kali for relief and safety, as well as fully enjoyed the emotional and artistic exercises of the Durga Puja.

Chapter 8

ADMINISTRATION AND OFFICIALDOM SIXTY YEARS AGO



Like the rest of British India, Sylhet has a highly organised and centralised administration now. It was not so during my early school days there. The district is divided today into five sub-divisions, each a district in itself, with its civil and criminal courts and its army of subordinate officials. These sub-divisions are again divided into a number of *thanas* or police stations holding jurisdiction for, what is called, the preservation of peace and order over a number of villages. In the villages themselves we have the *panchayets* or representatives of the executive authority in the sub-division, who control the village police and otherwise operate as the eyes and ears of the District Officer in their localities. Any one with a grievance against his neighbour has ready and easy access to the courts of justice. Distances have been very much shortened by roads and railways, and litigation has inevitably enormously increased.

Things were however very different in my boyhood. The present sub divisions had not yet come into being. There were a few *chowkies*, literally seats or stations, with an officer empowered to administer justice in the rural parts. And at each *chowkie* there was a Thana or police station. But though the Munsif or Judicial Officer in charge of the Civil Court at the *chowkies* could try petty civil disputes, all criminal cases, from the most trivial to the most serious, had to be taken before the courts in the headquarters of the district. And the difficulties of transportation, the

time and cost it involved in going from distant rural parts to the town which had to be done in the rains generally by boat, and on foot during the dry season, the want of sufficient accommodation for chance visitors there—all these effectively discouraged people from going to the British courts with petty complaints. These were generally settled either by the elders of the village or by the zemindar, if both parties happened to be tenants of the same person.

In my maternal uncle's village, one of my mother's relations was a big zemindar according to the estimates of those days. There was an old house, commanding an annual rental of about ten thousand rupees. During my visits to my mother's people, I spent practically the whole of my time in this house, and saw how either my granduncle (my mother's uncle) or some of my uncles (my mother's cousins) belonging to that family administered justice among their tenants. Calling those early recollections to my mind and comparing the present system of administration of criminal justice with those 'primitive' methods of our own old village life, I cannot say that, generally speaking, the latter suffers in comparison with the former either in impartiality or in efficiency. This family not only had their court but also all the accessories of judicial administration. They had their *payiks* or *peons* to fetch offenders to the zemindar and enforce payment of the penalties imposed. They had even a small room that served for a house of detention, which never extended beyond a few hours or a day or two at the utmost. It was both a criminal and a civil prison; and not only people guilty of offence against their neighbours had to suffer detention here, but recalcitrant and defaulting tenants also used to be locked up here until they agreed to pay up their dues or swear complete obedience to the zemindar. The new foreign political power in the country commenced naturally to look upon these privileges and prerogatives of the 'natural leaders' of the people with jealousy and suspicion; and the exercise of these simple rights was soon classed as a crime, and the British law courts gradually killed those old instruments of the administration of simple and 'primitive' justice among our people. The passing

away of this old order took place before the very eyes of the generation to which I belonged.

Apart from the big zemindars, the elders of the village also settled most of the smaller civil and practically all petty criminal disputes in the village. The zemindar had no jurisdiction over men of his own class and social status, the so-called *bhadraloks*. And petty disputes among these used frequently to be settled by the intervention or arbitration of the elders of the village. During the Puja vacation when my father went home on his annual holiday, he used to be called upon sometimes to settle long-standing disputes among his friends and neighbours. There were however two or three elderly people in the village, who were held in universal respect by their neighbours and who used to help in the settlement of most of the differences that arose from time to time among their co-villagers. I still remember one or two of these good people. One of them was the oldest living representative of the Sens who, along with the Pals, as the earliest settlers in these parts, took precedence in all social functions of the other *bhadraloks* of the village. He was a lean and lanky person with grizzled hair and thin face, that seemed to have been emaciated by lifelong ethical and psycho-physical disciplines, and that lent, with his keen and piercing yet pleasant eyes overhung with bushy eye-brows, an impression of deep spirituality. He was much older than my father; and I called him *jetha* or old uncle. He was a man of very few words; and never mixed himself up with, nor let his own family to be entangled in, the rivalries or quarrels of the village. And I remember how people eagerly sought his intervention to settle their differences with their relations or neighbours. And rarely was his verdict resented, much less repudiated, by any party, whether it went for or against him. Sometimes he would be asked to settle these disputes himself; sometimes he would be invited to join a committee of elders to arbitrate between rival groups or families. In this way justice used to be administered and peace and order preserved in our rural society before the growth, into its present proportions, of the system of British law courts and other foreign instruments of peace and order in the country.

There was thus a very great difference between the ways of the administration of justice among our people and of those established by the British. The British system may be more scientific, as it is sought to be absolutely impersonal. But even science and impersonality have their disadvantages. The so-called science of justice in modern Western civilisation is built upon the hypothesis that the instinct of the man who comes to a court of justice is to try to cheat it by every possible means; and of the man who comes to bear witness to anything before a judge is to try to conceal the truth or tell a lie. The entire law of evidence in civilisation is built clearly upon these hypotheses. The tendency so far of the entire system of so-called civilised justice has been to go more by the light of abstract logical formulas than by actual insight into the psychology of the parties concerned or of those who help in its administration. Simple statements of honest truth, as *honestly perceived* by a witness, are tursted and turned on the screw of formal logic, to be made to appear as falsehood in so-called cross-examination. Our people instinctively saw these dangers and pitfalls of the British system of administration of justice and they tried religiously to avoid these courts, so far as they could, in those days. People who went to a British court of justice ran the risk of losing their souls—that was a very real fear in the mind of our orthodox people in the days of my youth. People with the fear of religion in their heart, would never agree to go to the witness box in a British court of law. They were mortally afraid of telling a falsehood, however unwittingly it might be, upon their oath. And the oaths in those days used often times to be administered to the Hindus in orthodox Hindu fashion, that is, the witness had to swear with the sacred leaf of the *tulsee* plant and a copper-cup containing Ganges water in his hand—materials that are universally used in all Hindu rituals—that he would tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. But there might be confusion of thought, many things beyond the control of the individual deponent might happen to mislead him and make him bear false witness against his neighbour. All these thoughts and sentiments very powerfully dissuaded good people, in those days, from going to a British court of justice. The vast

majority of our people preferred the rough and simple justice of the local zemindar or the village elders to the complex and confusing methods of the new law courts. These courts were established and ruinously multiplied in British India not really to supply but to create the demand for this so-called British justice. It was done not in malice but in ignorance and conceit.

Murder, grievous hurt during some faction fight, cattle-lifting and serious cases of theft or burglary—these practically finished the catalogue of crimes that were investigated by the police or went to a court in my early days. Occasionally theft of boats also brought the red-turban to the village. Cases of arson also occurred sometimes. But except for these, the people did not take any serious notice of the misdeeds of their neighbours. The more serious crimes were committed in connection with disputes over land or prestige among rival zemindars. The general population was, on the whole, very quiet, inoffensive, respectful of each other's rights and honour and rarely disturbed the public peace. I do not remember to have heard of a single case of murder or any other serious crime in our village or in that of my maternal uncle, the two villages with which I was most intimately acquainted, during the whole of my life in Sylhet. Neither do I remember any one among the Hindus of these villages who had ever had to suffer imprisonment. Sometimes a Mahomedan was said to have been sent to, or returned from, prison; and his offence was often times either common or serious assault committed in a fit of anger, or provoked by sex-rivalry or more often still in revenge for some wrong committed at the instance of the zemindar against a recalcitrant tenant or a rival zemindar.

A good many of the murder charges in Sylhet in those days had a woman in the case. The story of one of these I remember still. There was an element of horrid romance in it which could not be easily forgotten. The late Mr Sambhu Chandra Mookherjea, the editor and proprietor of the *Mookherjea's Magazine*, and later of the well-known English weekly, the *Reis and Ryot*, was so profoundly impressed by this case that he wove something like a romance out of the materials of it which was published in his magazine. I do not remember to have read it, but when I

came to know Mr Mookherjea personally in the eighties, he asked me if I had any knowledge of the actors in this brutal drama. Of course, I had. Indeed the memory of it was kept green for a long time among the rural population of Sylhet by a pathetic ballad, sung by boatmen and indeed all classes of our rural populations. Part of this ballad ran:

For Titu Mian, the life of the life of his
 mother, cries her soul,
 On water cries the water-fowl, on land
 cries the camel
 On his bed crieth his double-barrelled
 gun.

Titu Mian was a young Mahomedan landlord. He was a keen *shikari* or sportsman. He was liked by his peasantry. He was cruelly murdered one night in his own bedroom by three men, who were incited to take his life by his own wife. She was the common paramour of all these three. She invited them to her house to kill her husband, and thus free her from his lordship. The men dragged their victim from his bed and strangled him to death, while his wife used a bettel-nut cracker to draw out the eyes of the dying man. All these things came out in the trial, on the admission of the accused themselves. They were sentenced to death. When the time for their execution came the woman expressed a last desire to be hung from the same gallows by the side of the man who seemed to have been her special favourite. The whole town turned out to see the execution. I remember to have gone in the company of a number of fellow students to witness the ghastly scene. The woman had wonderful nerves. Death seemed to have no terrors for her. She walked with firm steps to the gallows and seemed apparently very pleased that her last prayer had been granted. All this lent a strange but cruel element of romance to the story of her crime, which became the theme of many a rustic ballad, to one of which I have just referred.

There were about half a dozen English officials in Sylhet in my early school days, namely the district judge, the district

magistrate and collector, a joint magistrate, an assistant magistrate, the superintendent of police and the civil surgeon. The judge was regarded as the highest official; and the etiquette of the District Bar, at least in Sylhet in my father's time, prevented any lawyer from the judge's court appearing to plead any case before the magistrate. Practice in the criminal courts was therefore confined to the *mukteers* and revenue agents only. The District Court pleaders appeared only in sessions cases before the District and sessions judge, but refused to take up any other criminal case, however important or whatever might be the fees offered. Nor did the District Court pleaders pay any ceremonial visit to any official except the district judge. All these tended to keep up some distance between these two officials of the district that was rather helpful to the purity and integrity of criminal justice and the independence of the bench from executive influence.

There were two or three deputy magistrates in Sylhet in those days. They were all from outside our district. One was from Calcutta, another a Mahomedan gentleman with the highest university degrees, was from Tippera. There was an ugly case concerning the latter in which a young and clever lawyer of the new English educated school had a hand, and which created a great sensation in the town at the time. It resulted in the enforced retirement of the young deputy magistrate. My father tried to help him in his troubles; and this gentleman remembered it years after when I met him in our public life. I never met the Hindu lawyer who was the cause of this gentleman's official ruin; but he too had, I think, to retire from Sylhet; and I cannot call to mind if he attained any success in his profession elsewhere or had to spend his days in obscurity. My father always believed in the innocence of the young Moslem deputy.

This case had some historic significance also, as indicative of the kind of official and moral atmosphere in which young Surendra Nath Banerjea found himself upon his first appointment as a member of the Indian Civil Service. Surendra Nath came to Sylhet, I think, either towards the end of 1871 or beginning of 1872. I was reading then in the second or preparatory class of the government school. Our old school house, on the top of the hill

known as Mona Rai's Tila, was undergoing thorough repairs at this time; and the classes were being temporarily held in the house of Babu Loknath Sarma, one of the biggest zemindars of the town. I remember how one afternoon in April or May the young Bengalee civilian came to see our school and in course of this visit came to our classroom and 'inspected' our work for a few minutes. I cannot call to my mind what kind of a figure he made then; but this much I know that he was dressed up as a *pucca saheb* and talked to us in English. I have, however, more vivid mental pictures of Mrs Banerjea, who, riding after the fashion of those days on a high pony with flowing skirts and veil that covered her hat, was the wonder of the town. There was an Armenian deputy magistrate in Sylhet in those days, whose clothes, though not his blood or colour, lent him something of the dignity of the ruling caste in the country. He was on very friendly terms with the Banerjeas; and he used to accompany Mrs Banerjea in her rides through the town.

We were too young, and stood too far away from the English or official society of the town, to have any correct and intimate knowledge of the social relation between the young 'brown' civilian and the 'white' officialdom in the place. I forget who was the joint magistrate of Sylhet at this time. Was it Mr Anderson, who on his retirement was for many years the Bengali Reader at Cambridge? I seem to have a very faint idea that Mr Anderson was either a Joint or an Assistant Magistrate at this time in Sylhet. I very well remember that a Mr Ponsford was one of the high officials at this period in Sylhet. He was the Secretary of the District School Committee; and we knew him therefore somewhat intimately. But whoever might have been the young English officials in Sylhet at this time, they did not freely accept the Bengalee civilian (and his wife) who had forced himself into their preserve, into their society.

I think Mr Muspratt was our District Judge at this time. One Mr Sutherland was the District Magistrate. No one, young or old, who once had a vision of the spacious and heavy form of this gentleman, could forget him all through his natural life. I have no idea as to how many stones he weighed in his *pyjamas*, or what

was the exact measure of his girth; but I know this much that he was the fattest specimen of human flesh that our people had seen upto that time. In all my roving round the world, I do not remember to have seen a fatter man than Mr Sutherland; and I doubt it very much if I saw any one even as fat as he was. It was the talk of the town that Mr Sutherland took one big and ripe sweet pumpkin, common to our parts, during his dinner; and considering his bulk everybody believed it. Local gossip said that when young Surendra Nath first came to Sylhet, Mr Sutherland tried to befriend him. But at the same time he refused to admit him upon terms of equality with the European officials into their society. Surendra Nath naturally resented this. That was the real root and origin of the misfortune that befell him in his official life. Mr Mackertich, though not a civilian, was also ambitious of being accepted into the society of local English officials, but was treated with ill-concealed rebuff. Naturally enough, the two Asiatics, suffering under the same sense of racial or the same colour disability, fell into each other's company and formed a small but defiant set between them. Those who have no knowledge of these things can never correctly understand or appraise the circumstances that led to Mr Surendra Nath's enforced retirement from the Indian Civil Service.

In the first place, the official atmosphere, that is, the ways and habits of the ministerial officers of the courts, and particularly of the criminal courts, was not at all what one could have wished. This came to light a few days previously in the case which involved the young Mahomedan deputy magistrate to which I have already referred. In the next place, there was something like an unspoken desire in the coterie of English executive officials to let the young Bengalee civilian find out his limitations and realise it that there were many other things than passing a competitive examination that went to the making of a true civilian; and that these other things were not easy to acquire by one not born to the station, so to say. Thirdly, there were 'native' officers in the lower ranks, who had easy access to the magistrate, and were easily tempted to carry tales to him; and who were shrewd enough to know what kind of tales were likely to be acceptable to their master. And all

these things conspired to make an easy victim of the foolish, and rather easy-going young Bengalee civilian whose unique position as a *saheb* had somewhat turned his head.

Though I was a young school boy then, I had glimpses of all these things at the time from the gossip of our elders. Subsequently when I came to Calcutta and joined the university I had something like an inside view of the case from my talks with Babu Kailas Chandra Deb, Surendra Nath's bench clerk in Sylhet, who too was dismissed for which his master was tried and punished.

It is very difficult to say if, and how far, any active conspiracy was hatched against Surendra Nath by his English colleagues in the administration of Sylhet. But it was the general impression among the people that Mr Sutherland actively worked for the dismissal of young Surendra Nath from the Civil Service. I cannot say how far, if at all, he had any active share in the conspiracy against Surendra Nath. But calling to my mind the things that were talked about in the town I cannot get rid of the conviction that but for him this young Indian civilian would have never come to grief for an offence which was really not so unusual among young officials in those days. Mr Sutherland encouraged spies to carry tales about Surendra Nath to him. We knew this at least to be a fact at the time.

The enemies of Surendra Nath have tried to make so much political capital out of the 'crime' for which he was dismissed from the Civil Service, and so few people really know the actual facts of this case, that I make no apology for giving all the details of it from the letter of the District Judge of Sylhet to the Hon'ble High Court at Calcutta.

Jaykrislina lost a boat and some twenty days after found it in the possession of Judhistir. In reply to a charge of theft to the police Judhistir said that the boat had been bought by his brother Gadadhar from Sarat. On July 15th the Assistant Magistrate (Mr Surendra Nath Banerjea) examined the witnesses sent in by the police. Gadadhar and two other witnesses deposed that the former had bought the boat of Sarat. On that both the accused (Judhistir and Sarat) were

released on bail, and a charge of theft and knowingly receiving stolen property was preferred only against Judhistir. On 24th August, witnesses on behalf of Judhistir were summoned by the Assistant Magistrate and examined; there was no proof against Judhistir and he should have been acquitted. The Assistant Magistrate ought to have asked Sarat if he could get witnesses to prove his innocence and if he could adduce reasons for suspecting that Judhistir and Gadadhar had falsely accused him of selling the boat before drawing up charges against Judhistir.... It is evident that Mr Banerjea after the 24th August forgot all about the case and did not draw up any charge against Sarat till 30th October (1872), when certain witnesses on behalf of Sarat appeared in his court. On September 2, Sarat petitioned the Assistant Magistrate to summon witnesses to prove his defence, but even then the Assistant Magistrate was not awakened to the fact that there was no charge against Sarat; on the 10th, 20th and 30th September also orders of some kind or other were passed; yet Mr Banerjea did not notice that there was no charge against Sarat. On the 30th October when a charge was drawn up against Sarat, no orders were passed regarding Judhistir. On the 30th one of Sarat's witnesses, who had been arrested, was in attendance, but Sarat refused to examine him saying that he had been tampered by Judhistir. On this date also no orders were passed regarding Judhistir, but 28th of December was fixed for causing the attendance of other witness of Sarat by arresting them. On the 28th December no witnesses appeared for Sarat, and so far as I can learn from the record the case was not before the court at all on that day. On the last day of the year, although there was no cause for bringing up the case, yet a report was made by the Court Head Constable that the accused were called but were not in attendance. The Mahurrer records the order that they be entered up as 'Ferari' in the monthly statement and that warrant be issued for their arrest. This warrant bears Mr Banerjea's signature. The warrant for the arrest of Sarat was sent to the Magistrate on 7th January

(1873) to be forwarded to the Magistrate of Tipperah for execution.

But as regards Judhistir, it appears he was produced by his surety on 31st December and by a petition permission was asked by his surety to be released of his suretyship. An order was passed thereon that he was to be brought up on the next court day, but nothing further was done in the matter. Mr Banerjea says he did not know what a 'Ferar' register was and that he never gave the order to place the accused on that register. Did he know nothing of the warrant sent to the Magistrate on the 7th January or of the order on the Lashkerpur Police to use every exertion to arrest Sarat and send him up in order that the case might be disposed of during the month of January? ... Mr Banerjea also should have observed before signing the return for December that this case regarding which he had furnished explanation for two previous months had vanished from the December return. The shifting of onus on to the shoulders of his subordinates cannot exempt Mr. Banerjea from the effects of his own carelessness or his ignorance when there were so many opportunities which should have brought the case to his remembrance. It is also to be observed that no order was passed calling on Sarat's surety to pay up nor was Sarat examined, when he of his own accord made his re-appearance in Mr Banerjea's cutchery.

On 27th January one more witness on behalf of Sarat was examined in presence of both the accused.... The *finale* of the case was that both the accused were acquitted on the 30th January, (1873).

The above facts speak for themselves, and I am reluctantly compelled to record my opinion that the explanations given by Mr Banerjea are most unsatisfactory and fail in every way to clear him from the charge of keeping the case against Judhistir pending for months after completion and of allowing an incorrect and improper return to be submitted to the Magistrate. I therefore accede to the request of the Magistrate that this case should be laid before the Honourable Court in

order that they may determine whether Mr Banerjea should, for the present, be allowed to exercise the power of a Magistrate of the first class. In coming to this opinion I have not overlooked the fact that Mr Banerjea has had a great deal of work to do....”

We did not know all these details at the time. I was too young, for one thing, to enter into them; and there were no popular vernacular newspapers at the time, like those we have now, that published and discussed these. All that we knew then was that Mr Banerjea had falsely entered some persons as *ferar* or absent when they were really present in his court. This thing has come down to posterity, through popular gossip, as ‘falsification of records’, and has lent to his ‘carelessness’, as the District Judge himself called it, the colour of serious and deliberate crime. But no one who reads the judge’s letter to the High Court, can possibly take the thing so seriously. Indeed, the thing for which poor Surendra Nath had been sought to be pilloried throughout his public life was not at all uncommon in our courts; and there were very few civilians, fresh from ‘home’ who could not, if their early records were carefully searched, be convicted of the kind of carelessness for which such indignities were heaped upon this young Bengalee civilian. And we all knew it at the time, as it was the universal belief among our people, that the crime of young Surendra Nath was really his colour and race and not any grave misconduct in regard to his official duties.

Looking back upon Surendra Nath’s case in the light of the general spirit and policy of the then Government of Bengal, if not of India, one finds the real reason of Surendra Nath’s disgrace in the almost open hostility of the British bureaucracy in Bengal (the word was unknown to us in those days) towards the English-educated Bengalees. Sir George Campbell was the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal and Lord Northbrook the Viceroy and Governor-General of India at that time. Sir George had declared an open crusade against higher English education in his province. In carrying out the educational policy enunciated in Sir John Wood’s Education Despatch of 1854, the Government of Bengal

had opened a number of colleges for high English education in the province. Burdwan, Hooghly, Krishnagar, Dacca, Berhampore, all these districts had thus each a high grade college of its own. These had been turning out hundreds of English-educated young men, who commenced to crowd the high offices under the government and the learned professions, particularly of law. These young men were also the pioneers of a great freedom movement in the country. Already four Bengalee young men, Satyendra Nath Tagore, Beharee Lal Gupta, Ramesh Chandra Datta and Surendra Nath Banerjea, had gone to England and passed into the Indian Civil Service with distinction. The British-born members of this Service, naturally, did not very much like all these new developments in the subject populations. So this higher English education had to be curbed. Sir George Campbell started his crusade against it. Krishnagar College was abolished. The other colleges in the *mafassil* were also threatened with the same fate. Even in far away Sylhet we learnt of these things from the two most popular and powerful Bengali weeklies, the *Somprakas* and the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, particularly the latter, whose trenchant criticism and vitriolic satire fascinated the people very much. The *Patrika* described Sir George as the great Destroyer, the Mahesvara of the Hindu triad. Mr Woodrow, who was the Director of Public Instruction in Bengal at the time, was described as the old Bull— 'The Booda Brisha'—on which Siva rides, and with the help of this old bull, Siva was destroying the educational world of Bengal.

Looking back upon all these things, I feel that the popular view that found expression through the Bengali press at the time of Babu Surendra Nath's case, namely, that he was a victim to jealousy and colour hatred, was not really without reason or justification. No one can read the letter of the district judge of Sylhet even today without having the same feeling. The offence revealed in this letter amounts to nothing more than grave carelessness and laxity of due supervision of the acts of his subordinates. But what young magistrate, belonging to the Civil Service, is there who has not been guilty of these offences in his

early official life? Even the district judge did not take a very serious view of Mr Banerjea's lapses.

I therefore accede to the request of the Magistrate that this case should be laid before the Hon'ble Court in order that they may determine whether Mr Banerjea should for the present be allowed to exercise the power of a Magistrate of the first class.

And as if to extenuate Mr Banerjea's carelessness he added,

I have not overlooked the fact that Mr Banerjea had a great deal of work to do.

I do not remember if there were any other charges against Mr Banerjea. At least this *ferari* business was all that we had heard of at the time. I have not before me any report of the proceedings of the special court of enquiry that sat to examine this matter, nor the final Resolution of the Government or the Secretary of State upon it. But public opinion at the time saw no justification for the measures taken upon such a small and common thing. The district judge, at the instance of the district magistrate, who was no friend of Mr Banerjea, asked only for the withdrawal of his powers as a first class magistrate. It is inconceivable, considering all that was the common talk of the town at the time regarding the relations between Mr. Sutherland and Mr Banerjea, that if the latter were guilty of anything more serious, action would not be asked for to be taken against him.

In spite of it all we find that a special court is constituted to enquire into this trivial matter. Mr Prinsep, who subsequently became a judge of the Calcutta High Court, and who was then district judge at Hooghly, was appointed President of this special court. Mr Reynolds, Magistrate of Mymensing, and Major Lamb, Deputy Commissioner of Nowgong, were appointed members of this court. But it is curious that Major Lamb refused to sit on the commission; I do not remember, and have not been able to

find out from such materials as are within my reach, who was appointed to take the gallant major's place.

But the most curious and significant thing about it is that Mr O'Kinealy, the Civilian Remembrancer of Legal Affairs in Bengal, who had been in charge of the celebrated Wahabi case on behalf of the government, was placed in charge of the prosecution in Surendra Nath's case also. And Mr O'Kinealy acted not only as counsel for the prosecution but also practically as the government attorney, for he examined witnesses for the prosecution in his bungalow before the trial commenced and behind the back of the accused! Surendra Nath applied to government to have the trial in Calcutta instead of at Sylhet. It was by no means an unreasonable prayer. The attitude of the Sylhet officials was notoriously unfriendly to him. All the witnesses for the prosecution were practically under the influence of these officials, many of them were ministerial officers under the Magistrate, Mr Sutherland. But the government refused to make this fair concession, though they generously offered him assistance of counsel or any other officer in the service of the state, to help him in his defence. Surendra Nath, in reply, asked for the services of the advocate general or the standing counsel. The government replied that these law-officers were not available. So Surendra Nath engaged Mr Montriou for his defence. All these facts leave little doubt in the mind regarding the spirit that moved the government in first directing Surendra Nath's trial before a special court, under Act XXXVII of 1850, and then conducting the whole prosecution, as if it was a great state trial involving important issues affecting the very existence of the Raj!

Chapter 9

THE CLOSING YEARS OF MY SCHOOL LIFE



By the time I was in the second or preparatory class of the Government School at Sylhet, I reached my fifteenth year. This was in 1872. And my father, following the old injunction of Chanakya that when a boy attains his sixteenth year the father should treat him as a friend, commenced to relax the rigorous discipline to which I had hitherto been subjected. I was now permitted to go out shopping by myself sometimes. I was no longer subjected to any physical chastisement for my lapses; but my father commenced only to remonstrate with me, or admonish me verbally for my misconduct. I was also allowed to handle small sums of money for my personal expenses. During the Durga Puja this year (1872), I remember how I had a share in making the purchases for the Puja, and for the first time introduced Hinks' double-wick kerosene wall lamps into our house at Poil for lighting the big dancing hall or *nat-mandir* during the festivities of the Puja, which had till then been lighted by chandeliers and wax candles. This was quite an unorthodox innovation; and though I was allowed to fix up these kerosene oil lamps in the *nat-mandir* and on the verandah of the *Chandi-Mandap*, inside the holy room, where the image of the Goddess was set up, nothing except wax candles and coconut oil lamps were admitted. In short, from this time forward I was treated as a responsible member of the family and duly consulted upon every important matter by my father, who never discharged his duties as the head of the family

without due and indeed respectful consultations with every member of his household. The *paterfamilias* in the old Hindu household, as I saw him in my own home and among my friends and relations, was by no means the autocrat he is generally pointed to have been by ignorant foreigners. I do not know anything of the position of this *paterfamilias* in the law and social constitution of the ancient Roman people except what can be generally gathered from popular books. It may be that the Roman *Paterfamilias* was an autocrat and held absolute authority over the members of his household. But our family life and structure do not seem to support this idea of the position of the Hindu *paterfamilias*. At least the saying of Chanakya, which enjoins that as soon as a son attains the age of sixteen he should be treated as 'a friend' by the father, lends support to the contrary idea that the ideal and structure of the Hindu family, like that of the Hindu society and state, was constitutional and democratic and by no means military and despotic. As soon as the son comes of age, he is a responsible member of the family-republic, and has a voice, along with his elders, including his father, in the direction of the affairs of the joint family, even as he has an equal share, with the rest, in the property of the family. I did not know or understand these things in this way in the days of my youth, but looking back upon my experiences of my early relations with my father I can find no other reasonable interpretation of it than this. From my fifteenth year onward, though I was too young and immature to render any real help in the decisions regarding our family affairs, my father commenced to consult me on every important matter. And this is how at the age of fifteen I became a party to the settlement of my sister's marriage that caused for some time very great trouble in our family.

My mother had many children, nearly a dozen I think, but of these we two, myself and my sister Kripa, were the only ones living at this time, the rest had died after a few days' life here and some only after a few hours of birth. My sister Kripa was about three years younger to me. But as I had no brothers or sisters between us, she had frequently a bad time in my hands. With the instincts of the housewife in her, she could not put up

with my wasteful ways and used often to call mother whenever I was up to any mischief. One of my mortal sins in those days was to steal sweets and other edibles from my mother's store, whenever she was taking her afternoon rest or went to see the ladies in the neighbouring houses, and enjoy these in company with other boys. And my sister used very often to keep watch over my movements when mother was not in sight, and call out to her that I was doing this, that or the other thing, particularly running away with the sweets in her store. And as often as she did this police duty, she had more or less severe beating from me, as after having taken the things that I wanted, I would always punish the police officer for her gratuitous interference with my predatory excursions. In justice to myself I must say this, however, that I invariably tried to bribe her and give her a share of my booty before trying to punish her. But as she invariably refused with ill-concealed scorn my incriminating offers, I had no option but to try to silence her by physical means.

Kripa was still unmarried when I attained my fifteenth year. She was over twelve then. That was a rather rare age for girls of respectable families among us to remain unmarried. But my father held somewhat liberal views in these matters; and he was evidently not anxious to secure a place for himself in heaven by giving his daughter in marriage at the age of eight or even ten, according to the law of Parasara; nor did he refuse to give her some little literary education either. My mother never knew to read or write. It was considered an evil thing in those days for respectable ladies to learn to read or write. It was not because the men were jealous of their women and did not wish them to be as educated and cultured as they themselves were but because education had then no intrinsic value in itself, except in the case of the high-caste Brahmins, who had to read the law to be able to interpret it to their *yajmanas*; and by whom, therefore, the study of these holy books was regarded as of some intrinsic virtue and value. But Sanskrit was a very difficult language to learn and it took quite a long time to master. Those whose professional duties did not require a knowledge of this sacred and difficult language, therefore, rarely or never cared to waste so much

time over it. Even the Brahmins themselves rarely studied Sanskrit seriously; most of them, even among those who officiated at sacred rituals wherein holy texts had to be recited, hardly understood the meaning of their own *mantrams* or of the texts they recited during their daily prayers. Persian was the language of the court; and those who wanted to enter the service of the government learnt Persian just as the present generation of office-hunters learns English. Our vernacular was in a most neglected condition, and few people had any serious call to learn it. Under these circumstances, it was nothing strange that our ladies did not in those days receive any literary education.

But all the same, it will be a great mistake to think that Bengalee Hindu ladies did not know to read or write before the British came to our country. One Mr Lushington was deputed by the Government of the East India Company in the early years of the last century to make a survey of the indigenous education of the people of Bengal, and he found that there were two classes of Bengalee women who knew well their own language and literature. These were the women of the Vaishnava denomination, who considered it a religious duty to read the scriptures of their sect; and as all or almost all the sacred books of the followers of Shree Chaitanya Mahaprabhu were in Bengali, every devout Vaishnava of this denomination, male or female, had to learn to read their own vernacular as part of their religious duty. Thus it was that Vaishnava ladies, as a rule, were all literate as far back as the beginning of the last century; and they must have been literate from generation to generation, almost ever since the days of the Mahaprabhu, to be able to furnish such a large class of literate women during Mr Lushington's investigations. I had it from Pandit Bijay Krishna Goswami that he himself saw about the seventies of the last century learned Vaishnava women in Brindaban, and he noticed one in particular who was a recognised and popular interpreter of the Bhagavata lore, and who used to draw large audiences to her exposition of this sacred book. She was a Bengalee lady. And she must have got her education both in Bengali and Sanskrit long before girls' schools were started in Bengal under British auspices.

There was another class of Bengalee ladies, whom also Mr. Lushington found in his survey, who were fairly well educated. These ladies were found among the higher classes of Hindus of North Bengal. And unlike the Vaishnava women these ladies were prompted to educate themselves or be educated by their parents and guardians by secular motives. These families were generally connected with the big zemindar families of North Bengal; and the girls of those castes and families who could be married to these zemindar families were taught to read and write and understand the accounts as a provision against the unhappy contingency of their premature widowhood that would leave charge of big estates in their hands, and in that case it would be of very great help to them in discharging the heavy responsibilities of their position if they knew how to read, write and cast accounts. This was how among the Brahmins and Kayasthas of North Bengal there grew up a class of ladies who were literate and who were systematically taught the three Rs by their parents.

And as this education was given to meet the unfortunate exigencies of widowhood, it seems that the idea got abroad and took possession of the popular mind that if a girl learnt to read and write she called down the miseries of premature widowhood upon her. This prejudice was very strong in our community in my young days. I am not sure that my mother was herself absolutely free from it. But my father was a confirmed fatalist like most people of his time and class; and his one incontrovertible argument was that if it was fated that his daughter should be cursed with early widowhood, nothing could prevent it; nor could her learning to read and write any way be instrumental in bringing about that calamity. Besides, my father's Islamic education must have proved the fallacy of the popular notion in this matter because his Persian studies must have acquainted him with the stories of Moslem ladies of the higher classes who were not only literate but some of them highly educated in Persian and Arabic. My father, therefore, did not at all object to my sister's receiving some literary education. And Babu Naba Kishore Sen, my father's friend and co-lodger, took up the duty of teacher to my sister. Indeed, but for him and if he were not our neighbour and had not such great

influence over my father, I doubt it very much if she would have received even the little education which she did.

Considering my father's position, proposals for my sister's marriage commenced to come to him, I know, from the time when she was hardly ten; however, neither my father nor my mother paid any heed to these. But when she passed her twelfth year, my father became a little nervous about her marriage. There was a young man, who was then reading in the Government High School at Sylhet; my father had an eye on him as a possible bridegroom for my sister. And when he passed the entrance Examination, the marriage was settled. My father went home to Poil with us all for the celebration. A couple of days before the formal settlement of the marriage, a messenger arrived from the bridegroom's father demanding a couple of hundred more as the bride's dowry than had been previously settled. This very much upset my father. He saw in this an attempt at extortion. He said if they had asked for five hundred rupees more instead of only a couple of hundred when the arrangements were being made, he would have gladly paid that sum. But this was an attempt to extort money by placing him in an awkward position. He had come home for the marriage, all arrangements had been made for the ceremony on a day fixed in consultation with the boy's father; indeed, friends and relations had been already apprised of it. My father point-blank refused to accede to this preposterous demand. He wrote to him to say that the marriage was definitely broken off.

Having broken off this marriage my father resolved, however, not to return to his work in Sylhet without finishing my sister's marriage. There had been other proposals also for her hand. My father, like the rest of his generation, believed in an overruling Providence or Fate that ordered the affairs of men. Marital relations, they believed, were specially preordained. No proposal for marriage was therefore definitely rejected by any respectable and pious Hindu. To all the proposals that had come for my sister's marriage, my father had simply replied that he could not give a definite answer immediately, as it all rested upon the will of God. After this arrangement was broken off, he commenced

to look into these other proposals and took up one of these seriously. The party was very respectable. The bridegroom was fairly educated. His uncle, the head of the family, was well-known to my father and had personally asked for my sister's hand for his nephew. My father now thought of him and made up his mind to accept this offer.

Though he was the head of the family and could exercise absolute authority in these matters, he did not like to shoulder the entire responsibility himself. So he came and asked, first, my mother, whether she was willing to accept this proposal. My mother replied, "If you think it right, do so." My maternal uncle had come to our house for my sister's marriage as previously arranged. Having consulted my mother, my father went and asked him, whether he should immediately accept that other offer. He also made a similar reply. My father next asked a cousin of mine, who was his clerk and general assistant. He too accepted the suggestion. I was then in my sixteenth year and following the injunction of old Chanakya that as soon as the son attained the sixteenth year of his age, his father should regard him as an equal and a friend, my father next called me and asked my opinion about this proposal which he wanted to accept. I too gave my consent. Last of all, there was our old retainer or serf, who too was a member of our family, though not of our caste, and as a member of the family he also had a right to be consulted in a serious matter like this. My father called him and explaining the situation to him asked him whether this proposal might be accepted, and he also made a similar reply to that given by all of us. So my father at once wrote to the uncle of the bridegroom, saying that if he could arrange to have the marriage celebrated within a fortnight he was agreeable to accept his old offer. Thus my father committed himself definitely to this proposal. This letter was sent by a special messenger to avoid preventible delay in its delivery and getting a reply to it. The reply came almost post haste. My father's condition that the marriage must take place on a particular day mentioned by him was accepted by the bridegroom's party, and so there was no getting out of it.

Though all of us gave our consent to it, we did not really approve of this selection. The bridegroom, while eligible in every other way, was known to be addicted to strong drinks, which was the curse of young Bengal of that generation. My father's family, as I have already said, belonged to the Vaishnava denomination, with whom drinking spirituous liquor was counted as a mortal sin. We had, all of us, therefore a strong aversion against those who indulged in it. My mother was furious with herself for having given her consent to this proposal. Her opposition increased through a casual remark made within her hearing by a mason then working in our house, who had been to Silchar, where the prospective bridegroom was employed, and who said that though in every respect he was a very fine and esteemable young man, he was rarely sober for even a couple of hours during the day. My maternal uncle, my cousin, my *Dada* Dagoo, and myself, we were all strongly opposed to this marriage. But having given our assent to it, when my father asked us before accepting it finally and formally, we commenced to bitterly repent our folly now. But what could we do ? How could we prevent it? We put our heads together, and saw that the only chance of escape lay in the bridegroom's inability to come home from Silchar, his place of employment, in time for the ceremony to be performed on the day fixed by my father, for he had set that down as an absolute condition of the marriage. So we decided to send a telegram in the name of the uncle of the bridegroom to the latter at Silchar, asking him, at the last moment, not to come home until he heard again from him. We had, if I remember correctly, this telegram sent to Sylhet, through a special messenger, for in those days there were no telegraph offices except in the headquarters of the district; but whether it was actually sent or not, I do not remember, most probably it was not sent. In any case, the young man left for his home in due time, and all chances of our preventing the marriage failed.

On the day the ceremony of *pan-patra*, called *pane-khili* in the patois of our district, when the marriage is finally and formally settled and presents are exchanged between the bride's and the bridegroom's families, was to be celebrated and our house was

filled with friends and neighbours, and the musicians came and started to play, my mother took up an openly hostile attitude. She commenced to cry aloud, taking my sister's name, as if she was dead and threatened first to kill her and then kill herself before she would agree to such a match. My father was in a fix. He commenced to walk up and down between the inner or the ladies' apartments and the outer or the men's quarters like one distracted. I also began to alternately go to my mother trying to pacify her, and coming out to consult my maternal uncle and cousin as to what must be done in the circumstance. The one idea that obsessed my mind was that if in a serious matter like this my father failed to keep his word, whose word was universally accepted by the people as a bond, it would so hurt his self-respect, that he would not perhaps survive the shock for long. So, though I was myself strongly opposed to this marriage, I felt impelled to sacrifice my sister's future happiness to my father's reputation for veracity and reliability. My maternal uncle and my cousin and my Dada Dagoo also took the same view. After about two hours' hesitancy and struggle, I at last made up my mind to make a final appeal to my mother; and going to her explained my reasons for allowing this marriage to take place to save my father's character, and possibly even his very life. This somewhat quietened my mother's opposition; and she told my father that since the matter had advanced so far and he could not honourably go back upon his word, the marriage could not be broken off; so let the will of the Lord have its course. Having thus given her consent to the final ceremony, she commenced to weep bitterly thinking of her dear daughter's future.

At first I was in mortal anguish thinking of my father, and whether, if the proposal broke through at that stage, he would survive the indignity of it. Now when my mother gave her consent and the preliminary ceremonies were over, I became equally frightened at the thought of my mother, whether she would survive this shock to her mother-love. So I bethought myself of her own people, and without a moment's delay, as soon as the formalities were over, I had a pony fetched from our friend, the Mahomedan zemindar, who kept a fairly good stable, and rode to my maternal

uncle's place, which was about twenty miles off, to invite my mother's relations and, indeed, bring them to our house immediately. This was done, and it was only after her own people came that my mother became a little quiet and applied herself to the usual preparations of the marriage.

In the meantime, however, a letter from Babu Naba Kishore Sen very much upset my father also. Babu Naba Kishore was touring in the *mufasssil*, and, as luck would have it, he chanced to meet my sister's future bridegroom on his way home from Silchar, riding furiously with a couple of bottles of strong spirits bulging out of his coat-pockets. He must have been more or less tipsy, as he took little notice of Babu Naba Kishore, who was very well known to him. Babu Naba Kishore asked my father to break off the engagement at any cost. My father held Babu Naba Kishore in such deep affection and high regard that he never did anything without consulting him. Such a letter coming from such a source, very naturally, upset him. He showed this letter to us; and asked us as to what was to be done. But the thing had advanced too far. This letter was received only two days before the marriage. Our house was full of friends and relations, who had come for the marriage from all parts of the district. The Brahmins were being fed in honour of the occasion at the very time when a special messenger brought this letter. To break off the marriage after all this would cause a very grave scandal in the community. So there was nothing left to us but to resign ourselves to the hands of Fate. But the thing so rankled in my father's heart that when the bridegroom came, and the ritual was being arranged, he sternly forbade any display of the presents intended for the bridegroom, saying, that it was enough that he was sacrificing his daughter, why should he add to it the sacrifice of so much valuable furniture and other household goods as well? Thus it happened that during the marriage ritual, my father gave away his daughter, like a very poor man, simply with the things which it was customary in those days, as it is even now, to give to the bridegroom, as part of his present. My father relented somewhat the next day, and yielded to our request to let him have the things that had been bought for him when he was leaving our house with his bride.

My sister's husband, Iswar Chandra Nag, was, however, soon found to be by no means a bad character at all. He very much improved upon closer acquaintance. He was fairly well-educated and highly intelligent, and was one of the most genial of men I have ever come across. He had a very fine presence, was an exceedingly handsome man, both in colour and cut. And it seems to me that these very fine physical and mental qualities were the cause of the fatal habit which he contracted. And after his marriage, though he did not or could not give up this habit, he always stood in great fear of my sister, and would never come home in a state of intoxication. Generally he gave himself up to it when he went out of town in course of his official work as a police officer investigating some crime in the *mufassil*. Once when he was travelling by boat and my sister was with him, she discovered about half a dozen bottles of brandy among his kit and threw the whole lot into the water; and it is worthy of note that my brother-in-law never uttered a word of protest or expressed any anger against her act, but took it quietly, like a schoolboy discovered in some wrongdoing. But this drink habit killed him; and my poor sister became a widow within three years of her marriage, when she was just sixteen! She had only one daughter, born after her father's death.

My acquaintance with modern Bengali literature commenced about this time. When I was about fourteen or fifteen years of age, reading in the second class of our school, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar's *Seetar Banabas* or *Exile of Seeta*, which was a free adaptation of Bhababhuti's immortal Sanskrit drama the *Uttara-Rama-Charita*, as well as the works of Akshay Kumar Dutta, which were free translations from standard English books on popular science and morals, were our school textbooks; and we had to read them in our class. But about this time I came to know Bankim Chandra Chatterjee through his earlier novels, *Durgesh Nandinee* or *The Chieftain's Daughter* as it has been christened in its English translation by Mrs Knight and *Kapalkundala*. Babu Naba Kishore Sen became a great admirer, I think, of Bankim Chandra, as whatever he wrote used to be bought by Babu Naba Kishore; and thus it was that I was able to

see and read them. My father never took any notice of what I read, and I found no difficulty in securing whatever books Babu Naba Kishore bought through his wife, who exerted a great influence over the evolution of my early youth. She was about four or five years older than myself, but except my sister Kripa, who was three years my younger, and could not be treated upon terms of equality and frank friendship, there were no other ladies among my acquaintances who could treat me upon terms of more or less equality. I was also the only youth in our compound with whom she could mix freely, as the others were either about her own age or older than herself. So it happened that we two became like brother and sister, and she treated me all through her life with sincere love and affection. And she was my medium in getting whatever Bengali books Babu Naba Kishore Sen bought at this time.

When I was reading in the first class of our school, Bankim Chandra's *Banga-Darshan* made its appearance. And I still remember how eagerly I read it. The skit headed *Byaghracharya Brihallangool*, which painted a gathering of learned tigers and how they discussed various burning topics of the day, made the profoundest impression upon my young mind. Of course, I did not understand its reference or import. I cannot recall these even today. But the story by itself was exceedingly fascinating. The opening chapters of *Bisha-Briksha* or the *Poison Tree* also left a lasting mark upon my mind. I have never been able to forget the thrill which I had as I read the vision or dream of poor Kundanandinee; and the picture of the dark and stormy night and Nagendra's boat and his appearance to the girl, whom fate had ordained to be entwined with his own life; all these things, read more than fifty years ago, live still as things of yesterday in my memory.

In the ordinary course, I should have sat for the entrance examination of the Calcutta University, as the matriculation examination was called in those days, in November 1873, but I did not pass in all subjects in the test examination. And Babu Durga Kumar Basu, though allowing other boys of my standing to appear at the examination, came and spoke to my father and

kept me back, in the hope that I would be able to pass in a higher class, with better preparation, next year. And as my father agreed with him, I could not sit for my final school examination with my other class-fellows. I felt slightly hurt, specially as I did not like being left behind some of my class-mates.

The next year, however, did not find me more diligent in my studies. But my father engaged a private tutor for me to coach me in mathematics, a subject in which I was woefully deficient. The Second Master in the Government School, Gobinda Chandra Das, was our mathematical teacher; and my father engaged him as my coach. This was of great help to me; and I still believe that but for his help I could never have got through my mathematical papers, particularly the Algebra paper, in the next year's entrance examination also.

But, generally speaking, I was not more diligent in my school work in 1874 than I was in 1873. But I read more outside books, and indulged in dreams of literary eminence all through this year. I commenced now to write Bengali poems and send occasional contributions to the *Dacca Prakash* and *Hindu-Hitaishinee*, the two Bengali weeklies of Dacca in those days. I remember, a few verses sent by me to the latter paper in memory of Justice Anukul Mukerjee found a place in its columns, and it raised me somewhat in the eyes of my fellow-students. There was really no worth in these essays in versification; but I have held it ever since as an article of my literary creed that a man, who does not write 'poetry' before he is eighteen is not human, and he who writes it after that age, is either a true poet or a great fool.

These literary ambitions and efforts, however worthless in themselves, were the psychological origin of a youthful friendship which has had a profound influence upon my moral and spiritual evolution. Sundari Mohan Das had been a class-mate of mine ever since the establishment of the Government School in Sylhet in 1868 or '69; but there was hardly any special intimacy between us. In 1873 he passed the entrance examination with some distinction, and left Sylhet for Calcutta early in 1874. He came back during the summer vacation, and hearing of my literary ambitions and efforts, he came to see me one hot and steaming

June day in our school. Having seen the old teachers he sent word to me, and I was proud of this especial recognition from one who, having passed out of school and joined the Presidency College in Calcutta, had attained a position far above us all old boys in the school. And what was my wonder when I saw the great transformation that a few months in Calcutta had worked in him! The glow of youth and health in his ruddy cheeks, the sudden development, at the touch of the springtide of life, of his youthful figure, the clean and well-arranged *dhoti*, and sash or *chadar*, his smiling face and genial greeting—all these made a profound impression upon me. And how proud I felt of myself, when he asked me if it was true that I had commenced to write poetry and send articles to the press. And at that moment, on the top of the high hill, where our school stood, in the southern veranda, swept by the cool southern breeze, first germinated a friendship that has, by the blessing of God, lasted our whole lifetime.

Chapter 10

STUDENT-LIFE IN CALCUTTA



The examinations of the Calcutta University used to be held in my time during the winter. So far as I remember, the entrance and the first examination in Arts, which is now called the intermediate examination, were held about the first week of November; and the college session used to begin in January, after the Christmas holidays, which we knew then as the 'winter vacation'.

I sat for my entrance examination in November, 1874. For the first time in that year prescribed textbooks in the English language were abolished, and we had to prove our proficiency in this language by our general knowledge of English grammar and literature, and by our ability in original English composition and retranslation, as it was called. About this time Sir George Campbell's new system of recruitment for the subordinate executive services, that is, for appointments as deputy collectors and deputy magistrates and *canoongos* or lower settlement officers, was introduced; and in consequence of it, surveying and mensuration were made optional subjects in the entrance examination, because these were compulsory subjects in the new examination for deputy magistrateship. These innovations were introduced in 1872, when we had a Survey Master from the Engineering Department of the Calcutta Presidency College appointed to our school in Sylhet.

In 1874 Sylhet was separated from Bengal, upon the institution of the province of Assam under a Chief Commissioner. Assam was regarded as a very backward province, and the government thought it necessary to offer special encouragement to the people by allotting a large number of scholarships to students passing the university entrance examination from the

Assam schools. This was how, though I passed the entrance examination without any manner of distinction at all, I secured a monthly scholarship of rupees ten and came and had my admission in the Presidency College at Calcutta as a 'scholar' or scholarship-holder.

Facilities of railway and steamer communications have brought Calcutta much nearer to Sylhet now than it was when I first left my home to join the university in Calcutta. Goalundo was, as now, the farthest limit of our Eastern Bengal Railway system. Two or three years previously, about 1869 or '70, Sylhet saw, for the first time, a steamboat. And I still remember what a stir of wonder and admiration the sight of such a huge boat, floating on our river and making all sorts of sounds, evoked in our minds. We approached the thing with great awe, and relying upon our knowledge of the English language, some of us, school boys, approached the commander of the vessel, an Englishman, praying for permission to have a look at the machineries. This permission was readily given, and we went into the boat with great eagerness, and had an inside view of the huge iron rollers and other parts of the machinery. It was, however, not merely a feast to our eyes. The smell of roasting chicken and curried mutton also made our mouths water. We had never any experience of these before; and all these made our first visit to a steamer a memorable incident in our life. It was a cargo steamer, belonging, I think, to the India General Steam Navigation Company. Subsequently an irregular service, which was called on paper a 'fortnightly service', was opened between Sylhet and Calcutta. The steamers went up to Sylhet during the rains only, when the river Surma was navigable by such big boats upto the town. During the rest of the year Chhatak, about twenty miles down from Sylhet, was the terminal steamer station of this line.

Towards the end of December 1874, I left Sylhet for Calcutta. It was rather a far cry from Sylhet to Calcutta in those days. And Calcutta was not quite the kind of sanatorium that it is regarded to be by our *mufassil* friends today. People from our parts rarely came to Calcutta except when they were upon a pilgrimage to Benares or Gaya, or when on some specially auspicious occasion

they wanted to have a dip in the sacred Ganges. And the whole journey was looked upon as so risky that friends and family used to look upon it almost as the commencement of their travel to the 'other side'. My father had been on these pilgrimages more than once, and on every occasion he had left a few of his fellow-pilgrims behind, victims of cholera and malignant fevers. It can therefore be easily imagined with what feelings my parents, and specially my mother, permitted me to take these risks. But not only my father but even my mother as well were determined to give me the best education available, so that I might keep up, and indeed enhance, the position of their family, and add lustre to their name. This was quite natural to my father. But such sacrifices of personal sentiments for the future good of the son were not very common in those days among Bengalee mothers. My father had secured a good competence for his family. He was the owner of a fairly big estate with an annual rental of about 2500 rupees, and with every prospect of further increase, in course of time, with the expansion of the cultivated area and better management. He had, besides this estate, other smaller landed properties that also brought in a fairly good income, according to the standards of those days. I might very well therefore spend my days as a respectable village landlord and hold a fairly good position in society without any university education. But my father had higher ambitions for me. He wanted me to succeed him in his profession also and some day become the leader of the Bar of which he had been in his time a leading member. He felt bitterly the handicap under which he had to work owing to his ignorance of the English language. He was anxious that I should never suffer this disadvantage. My mother was always anxious that I should not be a 'dunce', as she would often times say. Whenever I was lazy or neglectful of my studies, particularly when, as a boy, I refused to leave her and come to school to Sylhet, she always declared that it would be a hundred times better that I, her only son, should die in my boyhood rather than I should grow up as a 'dunce' and a 'boor'. Many a Bengalee mother of her time and class would have opposed her son's sojourn to Calcutta for completing his education. But my mother not only

did not oppose, but, on the contrary, definitely encouraged my leaving home for the university in Calcutta.

It was thus that on an auspicious day, selected by careful examination of the calendar and the position of the planets at the different signs of the zodiac by a learned Brahmin, I left home for Calcutta after the usual rituals prescribed for these occasions. Having dressed for the journey, I was made to sit on a carpet, facing eastward, just on the threshold of our living room in the inner or ladies' apartments. Ripe paddy, some flowers a few sheaves of green grass, called *durba* in our language, and sandalpaste, a cup of fresh curd, a silver coin and some other auspicious things were placed on a plate and set before me. I was made to touch and smell these, as I recited the usual *mantram* or text after the priest. I still remember part of this *mantrarn*. It means that if a man, desirous of going on a journey, should see or hear or read of *dujas* or Brahmins, and kings, courtesans, and garlands of flowers, flags, fresh meat, ghee and curd, and honey, and silver, and ripe paddy, he shall surely attain his object. After this, I stood up and noticing by which nostril, the right or the left, I was breathing at the time, I was made to put forward the corresponding foot first, and repeating the name 'Durga' walked out of the house.

My mother was standing a few paces away, on my way to the outer courtyard, with the packet of the Mangal Chandi's talisman, described before, in her hand. She tied this in a corner of my sash, and after I had bent low to the ground and taken the dust of her feet, she first spat on ground, and making a paste by rubbing it with the small toe of her left foot, she took up this paste with the small finger of her left hand, and bade me God-speed on my journey with a calm and, indeed, smiling face. There was not a trace of anguish or even the slightest shade of concern in her face. But when I went back home from college, six months later, during my first summer vacation, I heard that as soon as I had passed out of our compound, my mother took to her bed, so overcome with grief at my separation, that for three days she could not get out of it or take her food. I wonder if I could have left my home with such unconcern if not, indeed, with positive

joy, if I had an inkling of what was eating my mother's heart out in such a way all the time she was making preparations for my departure and particularly when she blessed me with a smiling face as I stepped out of her room.

From Sylhet I rode to Chhatak (the winter terminus of the steamer service between Narayanganj and Sylhet), a distance of about fifteen or twenty miles. Babu Sundari Mohan Das had been to his home, which was on my way to Chhatak, for the winter vacation, and it had been arranged that he should 'chaperon' me during this first journey to Calcutta, and we two should travel together by the same boat. I met him at Chhatak, and as the steamer did not leave till about eight o'clock next morning we had to spend the night in the bazar, in a shop which provided accommodation for travellers. It was a tumble-down sort of hut, and though we had excellent food, good rice and pure *ghee* such as the people of the present generation rarely find even in rural Bengal, and fresh fish from the river, which were cooked by Sundari Mohan's uncle who had come to see him off, the sleeping accommodation was simply execrable. A creaking and uneven bamboo-bed, supported by shaky posts fixed on the ground, covered with two bamboo mats, one placed over the other, did duty for a cot. We spread our scanty beddings over it, and lay down to sleep. To add to our discomfort, down came a heavy shower during the small hours of the night, and we woke up shivering with cold. Chhatak stands almost on the foot of the Cherapoonjee hills, and cold here during the winter months is naturally severer than even in Sylhet, which is fairly cold during December, January and February. Neither Sundari Mohan nor myself was provided with heavy quilts for our journey; and we tried to keep off this shivering cold by pooling together, so to say, the natural warmth of our youthful bodies.

The inland steamer which we boarded at Chhatak was a big cargo boat. It had two huge flats, one attached to either side of it. There were gangways from the steamer to the flats; and we had practically the run of the entire lower decks of the three boats. There was little or no accommodation for upper class passengers, of whom there were really very few in those days.

Indian gentlemen generally travelled by country boats from one place to another. These boats plied sometimes from Sylhet to Calcutta, and even further up, as far as Benaras. My father had made pilgrimages to these holy places in these boats. As for the Europeans, they too often times travelled in a better class of country boats called *pinnaces*, which used to be rowed by six and sometimes even by eight or ten men. I still remember one of these pinnaces on the river Surma between Sylhet and Silchar early in the seventies of the last century, which was rowed by about ten people, singing a boat-song the refrain of which was: The *Shaheb* is going out on a journey, the *Shaheb* is going out on a journey: he has a *topee* of gold on his head, and tiny bells tingle at his ankles. Dr C.B. Clarke of the Bengal Educational Service, who was the Inspector of Schools, Dacca Division, in my young days in Sylhet, and who was the simplest Englishman I had seen till then, created quite a sensation among English-educated Bengalees of those days by publishing an ignorant criticism of Indian music, the best specimen of which he found in these boat-songs of our tea-garden coolies. The few European passengers who travelled by these steamers plying between Sylhet and Narayanganj or Goalundo were accommodated by the captain, who was a European, either in his own cabin or on the upper deck, where stretchers used to be put up for them at night. The engineer was also a European, who had a small cabin on the lower deck.

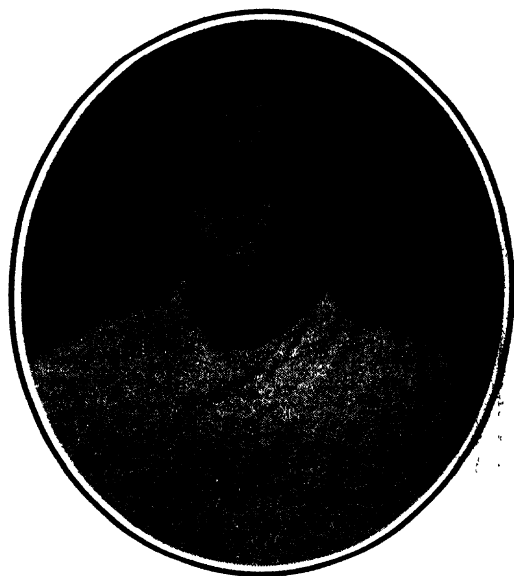
The flats were loaded with tea-boxes and packages of bay-leaves which grew in large quantities in the Sylhet hills, and with open boxes or baskets containing orchards in which a new and profitable business was just growing then. Messrs Englis and Co. were the collectors of these orchards from the Cherapoonjee hills in those days. We made our bed between the tea-boxes, which gave us protection from the wintry wind.

I enjoyed my first steamer journey from Sylhet very much. I had travelled a good part of this river-way in country boats with my father when very young, and he was stationed as *munsif* at Koterhat. But those memories had almost completely faded away; and everything seemed so new and romantic to my eyes. Though

this steamer service between Sylhet and Narayanganj had been opened two or three years previously, the people of the villages on the banks of the river along its route had not as yet become sufficiently familiar with it to treat the sight of these huge things, moving on the water without human hands, with indifference. As soon as we passed close to a village, the whole population—men, women and children, especially the women and the children—came out in full force to the riverside, and literally rendered *puja* or worship to the boat. The women cried out *ulu, ulu*, the cry which is made by them on all auspicious occasions, and prostrated themselves devoutly on the ground, taking the apparently self-moving boat to be some sort of a manifestation of the deity. Sometimes they would bring flowers and vermilion and other materials of worship, and throw these in the direction of the boat to the immense amusement of the European captain and his crew.

The clerk of this steamer was a Bengalee gentleman from the Dacca district. Hari Mohan Babu, if my memory does not betray me, was his name. I think he was a Vaidya by caste. He had his food prepared on a 'jolly boat', something like a life-boat, which was tied to the tail of the steamer with a stout rope and danced along on the top of the waves produced by the paddles. Hari Mohan Babu was a nice and generous man, and he offered hospitality to the *bhadralok* passengers who travelled by his boat. Sometimes when the steamer made a long halt at any port, we had our food cooked on land. In this way, we were able to 'keep our caste' on my first steamer journey from Sylhet to Narayanganj.

Our boat took about six or seven days to reach Narayanganj from Chhatak. We made a fairly long halt at Soonamganj, which was an important centre of the trade in limestone in those days, as I believe it is even today. After Soonamganj, we made a very long halt at Bhairab. Bhairab is now a station on the Mymensing section of the Assam Bengal Railway system, and joins the main line *via* Ashuganj, which is situated on the other side of the river Meghna, on which Bhairab stands. Bhairab had however been a very important centre of trade in East Bengal long before either



SUNDARI MOHAN DAS.



PANDIT SHIVANATH SASTRI.

steamer or railway communication was established with it. Its position on the Meghna, the high waterway in Eastern Bengal, made it the centre of our inland communication. It tapped the resources of the three districts of Sylhet, Mymensing and Tippera, all rich in agricultural and mineral products. When jute was first discovered as an important article of foreign trade, and the East Bengal peasantry took greedily to its cultivation upon a commercial scale, Bhairab became, within a few years, the most important centre of this industry, after Narayanganj, long, long before Serajganj had dreams of its present premier position as a jute mart in our province. Our boat stopped, I think, for nearly two days in this port, much to the disgust and impatience of passengers like ourselves, two young men, eager to reach Calcutta as quickly as possible.

We left this boat at Narayanganj. Narayanganj has grown into a very big town today. In those days it was merely an old and fairly large market. There were only two or three brick-built houses then in the whole of the Bengalee section of the bazar. Some European firms had already established their offices and godowns here and they had one or two fine buildings, but the rest of the port was covered with ordinary huts. There were no hotels for outsiders; though a few Vaishnava *akhara*s or places of worship found both food and accommodation for *bhadralok* travellers. We went from board our steamer to one of these places. It was a nice and clean place, and the priest in charge was a genial soul, who gave us good value for the money he charged for the *prasad* or the holy 'leavings' of the food served to the gods in the temple. Neither fish nor meat was permitted to be cooked or served in this holy place; but the vegetable courses were very good. He gave us good *ghee*, curd and whey, and even milk or cream, if we asked for these and were willing to pay extra for these delicacies. We slept in the open *nat mandir* or dancing hall of the temple at night, and spent the day roving about the bazar, and particularly in going to and fro between our lodging and the steamer station on the riverside, looking out for the vessel that was to take us from Narayanganj to Goalundo.

These steamers ran in those days only twice a week; and were very irregular in their service. The names of these two steamers, if I remember aright, were the 'Prince of Wales' and 'Prince Alice'. The latter, I think, was regarded as the swifter of the two; and we were naturally eager to catch this boat in preference to its rival. These steamers of the Dacca-Goalundo service were fitted out more as passenger boats than as cargo vessels though they did carry a lot of cargo also. It took nearly two days to reach Goalundo from Narayanganj. We had no friend on board these steamers between Narayanganj and Goalundo, like Hari Mohan Babu, to help us preserve our orthodoxy. Here it was that I was initiated into taking food cooked by Mahomedans. But the materials were not repugnant to Hindu orthodoxy for we had only fish and mutton from the *khalasis* or lascars of this boat.

I have no memories of the feelings with which I first saw Calcutta. It was, in any case, nothing like what the British provincial is said usually to feel when he first sees 'the lights of London'. Sylhet students reading in the Calcutta colleges had in those days a 'mess' of their own. It was in Nimoo Khansama's Lane that joined College Street to the south of the Medical College and Medical College Street, which ran to the west of this institution. The extension of the Medical College and the construction of the present Eden Hospital and the buildings attached to it have obliterated all traces of that old lane now. It was here in the Sylhet students' mess on this lane that I commenced my life in Calcutta. It was a small establishment. Though known as the Sylhet Mess, all the members were not from Sylhet. There were three members of this mess who belonged to Kumarkhali in the Nadia district. One of them, Babu Navadvip Chandra Pal, having passed his L.M.S. examination from the Medical College, went and took up private practice in his own village. Two other members, both of them medical students, came, one from Dacca, and another from North Bengal. The former Babu Manomohan Das took service under the government after taking his M.B. degree, and years after he passed out of college, I met him stationed as civil surgeon at Muttra, where he held a high position

in the Indian society. The other friend was the well-known homeopathic practitioner of Calcutta, Dr Chandra Sekhar Kali. The other members of this mess came from Sylhet, and were about ten or twelve in number. One of them came from a very respectable Brahmin family of Soonamganj, and it so happened that they were my father's clients; I was specially recommended by him to the care of this gentleman, the oldest member of our mess, who, having already taken his B.A. degree, was then reading for his law examination. His name was Babu Nabin Chandra Sarma. Having passed the B.L. examination he went and joined the District Bar at Sylhet, where he attained a fairly high position.

Thus for the first time in my life I found myself among strangers, and I shall never be able to get over the feelings with which I sat down to my first meal in this mess, and found different kinds of special delicacies which some had specially provided for themselves. In my father's house, either at Poil or in Sylhet, everybody, whether master or servant, had the same kind of food. But here, for the first time, I saw that my neighbour had fried eggs which were not served to me. Another gentleman had ghee with his *dal*, which he did not share with anybody else; and someone had curd which was not given to others. And all this created an intense repulsion in me. In course of time I understood that these special things were provided by individual members at their own expense, while the common fund of the mess found everybody the common food, consisting of rice, *dal*, fried vegetables, curried fish and an acid preparation. I too gradually lost the sense of delicacy which I had brought with me from my home and commenced to order special things for myself, or, more accurately speaking, for Sundari Mohan and myself, as we had, generally speaking, a common purse almost from the very day I arrived in Calcutta.

Students' messes in Calcutta, in my college days fifty-six years ago, were like small republics and were managed on strictly democratic lines. Everything was decided by the voice of the majority of the members of the mess. At the end of every month a manager was elected by the whole 'House', so to say, and he was charged with the collection of the dues of the members, and

the general supervision of the food and establishment of the mess. Generally an estimate of the probable cost of the messing and other charges was made and the manager was voted this amount for carrying out his duties. If the actual fell below the estimate, the manager, on the last day of his office, arranged for a big feast in which he spent all his saving; if his expenses for the month exceeded the estimates, the deficit was, of course, met by the members, but the manager had to face the unkind criticism of his executive abilities by his colleagues and, in extreme cases, which were however rare, even their frank censure. A successful manager was frequently begged to accept re-election; while the more careless and lazy members, who had often to pay out of their own pockets for their mismanagement, tried to avoid this honour.

But not merely in these financial matters, but almost in everything that concerned the common life of the mess, the members had a supreme voice. If a seat was vacant applications for it came before the whole 'house', and no one was admitted into the mess unless he was known to or certified by responsible people to be a decent and respectable fellow. Strict discipline was maintained, by the opinion of his own peers, over every young man who belonged to a mess. Disputes between one member and another were settled by a 'court' of the whole 'house'; and we sat night after night, I remember, in examining these cases; and never was the decision of this 'court' questioned or disobeyed by any member. Nor were the members of the mess at all helpless in the matter of duly enforcing their verdict upon an offending colleague. For they could always threaten the recalcitrant member either with expulsion from the mess, or if he refused to go, with the entire responsibility of the rent being thrown on him. And this had a powerful appeal to the good sense of the offending member who always submitted to the verdict of his peers on all matters.

We were by no means purrulent purists in our youthful days. The Calcutta theatres which had just introduced female artistes in our stage, were very largely patronised by us. At home we gave ourselves up often times to all sorts of amusements with an

abandon that would shock the puritans of our community. During our leisure moments we sang, we danced, we indulged in all sorts of satire and mimicry, all of which were by no means within the confines of what is called delicacy or decency in certain circles. But for all that, a really pure moral atmosphere pervaded our life in these messes. No manner of vice was tolerated; and the least suspicion of loose morals in a member would make him liable to very serious displeasure of his friends and, in extreme cases, to expulsion from the mess. And such was the force of public opinion in these small republics that I have known of cases of this punishment on offending members which so worked upon them that after a week of their expulsion from a mess, they looked as if they had just come out of some prolonged or serious spell of sickness.

We made from time to time laws and regulations for the proper administration of our little republics. I remember that a few months after I came to Calcutta, a set of laws were made for the conduct of the members of our mess. We were rather a mixed lot; some were orthodox Hindus, though their orthodoxy did not go so far as to prohibit association or inner-dining, provided the food was cooked by a Brahmin, with those who did not observe the rules of caste. Others were absolutely heterodox and openly violated all the rules of Hinduism in regard to eating and drinking. One or two were honest and professed Brahmos. Babu Nabin Chandra Sharma, who was the oldest member of our little republic, and as the most advanced university student among us was held in sincere respect by everyone, though not quite orthodox in his opinions, was yet exceedingly scrupulous in the matter of his way of life. He used to frankly tell us that personally he had absolutely no objection to take cooked food out of a non-Brahmin's hands, but he did not like to get cut off from his family on the one hand, nor to tell lies about his ways and habits when questioned by his people. So he thought the most honourable thing to do was to avoid everything that might create trouble or force him to a denial. He would not therefore take cooked rice out of the hands of us, Kayesthas and Vaidyas, but had no objection to our cooking curries *dal* and other things for him. And the reason why

he made this distinction, he would tell us, was that nobody would ever ask him if he took curries or *dal* cooked by non-Brahmins; the only questions, if ever any were raised would be if he had taken *bhat* or cooked rice out of their hands. The Bengali idiom never used curry or *dal* as the name for cooked food, *bhat* or cooked rice was the only term used in this context.

The composition of our mess called for some sort of a compromise between the so-called orthodox and the Brahmo and other heterodox members of our republic. So a rule was passed by the unanimous vote of the whole 'house' that no member should bring any food to the house (except, of course, loaves and biscuits that had commenced to be tolerated by the orthodoxy of the metropolis) which outraged the feelings of Hindu orthodoxy. It was, however, clearly understood that the members of the mess, as a body or even individually, would not interfere with what any one took outside the house. So we were free to go and have all sorts of forbidden food either at the Great Eastern Hotel, which some of us commenced to occasionally patronise later on, or anywhere else.

This law put us sometimes to very great inconvenience. One such incident has lived in my mind all these years. We had left Nimoo Khansama's Lane, and had taken a house in Madan Baral's Lane, off Wellington Square, at this time. One day our Brahmin cook was absent; and there was no dinner at home. So Sundari Mohan and myself, we two, went in search of food in Bow Bazar, where we had seen cooked meat and crabs, prawns and hot flour-cakes, fried in ghee or butter, called *poori* in Northern India and *loochi* in our own vernacular, put out for sale. We went to one of these shops and having bought a good quantity of curried mutton and *poori* or *loochi*; asked the shop-keeper if there was any room where his customers could have their meals. He showed us a door leading to a hall where we could safely enjoy our meal. So we eagerly went in, and found a table and a few chairs in that hall, which was lighted rather dimly by a kerosene lamp hanging from the ceiling. The place was by no means inviting, but we made ready to use it gladly on the principle of any port in storm; because though our own house

was very close to this place, the laws of our republic forbade the introduction of any cooked food into it from outside. We had just set our things down on the bare table and were going to sit down to our dinner when there entered a stranger with rather unsteady steps and a blue bottle peeping out of his armpit. This gave us such a fright that we really did not know what to do. The newcomer noticed our nervousness and in a very kindly way, but with a broken voice, stammered out: "What is there to be ashamed of, my friends? I have come for the same object as yourselves." And as with these words he brought out a small glass from his pocket and set the bottle from his armpit on the table, we gathered up our precious food and ran out of the room like thieves, trembling all over. Coming out into the street, we commenced to cast about for some place where we might go and sit and have our dinner. There was a small platform, just opposite the small lane which led to our house, in front of a neighbour's residence which was never used by the inmates of that house, but where the municipal officers, whose rank had better **not** be disclosed, used to rest early in the morning, and which had rather unappetising associations about it. In our extremity, we went to this place and finished the *pooris* and curries **standing** there in the dim light of the lamp that lighted our lane. **And** as soon as the prohibited things passed out of our hands **into** our gullets, we ran to our house and there gulped the food down with the water from the house tap.

I had my first truly forbidden food in the house of a friend, a class-mate of Sundari Mohan, and a near relation of a leading lawyer of the city, a well-known and wealthy member of the Calcutta Kayastha community. He invited Sundari Mohan, Tara Kishore Chaudhuri and myself to dinner at his house, which was not very far from our mess. It was here that both Tara Kishore Chaudhuri and myself had chicken curry for the first time in our life. And the incident is specially remembered by me, because early next morning Tara Kishore came out of bed and standing in the morning light, stretched out his arms to examine what strength and flesh he had gained through the forbidden meat taken overnight! Tara Kishore Chaudhuri rose to considerable

eminence in the Calcutta High Court Bar. A few years ago he gave up a very profitable practice and retired to Brindaban, where he has since been elected to be the head of an important temple, with the title *Braja-Videhi*, the highest spiritual recognition that one can get among the Vaishnavas of Shree Brindaban, reputed to be the scene of the life and *leela* or sport of Shree Krishna in the Hindu legends.

Talking of Tara Kishore Chaudhuri I am reminded of another anecdote of his student life in Calcutta, which found us considerable fun for many days. There was illness in our mess. I think Sundari Mohan was ill, and the doctor prescribed chicken soup for him. Tara Kishore Chaudhuri was sent to the Great Eastern Hotel for it. When asked if he had brought any vessel to carry the soup in, he innocently took out a copy of the *Statesman* newspaper that he had with him, and asked the man, who came out to serve him, to put the soup in it!

The story of my first lunch at 'Wilson's', as the Great Eastern Hotel was called in those days, also deserves recording. It was typical of our educated classes in those days (1875-'76). Sundari Mohan, myself, and three or four others went to have our 'tiffin' in this place. We had a private room to ourselves. But none of us had any experience of European food, and our first difficulty, when the menu was placed before us, was how to make our selection. We avoided this by leaving it to the Mahomedan *khansama* to get us the very best there was in the hotel. None of us had any practice in handling knives and forks. That was our next difficulty. And we tried to solve it by just trying to play with these as long as the waiter was present, but sending him out on all sorts of errands, we commenced to attack the victuals on our plates vigorously with hand and teeth. It was a very miserable experience after all. We did not like to hurt our dignity by honestly eating with our hands the things that we had to pay for so much; nor could we really eat in the unfamiliar way the Europeans do. That experience was so unpleasant that as long as I was a student, and not until I had become absolutely familiar with the foreign ways did I ever again cross the threshold of the Great Eastern or any other hotels in India. The story of that first fight with knives

and forks and spoons used to be frequently repeated among our friends in those days to their intense merriment.

These students' messes were naturally only of *muffasil* young men reading in the university. They were generally grouped according to the districts from which they came. We had thus a Tippera mess; a Barisal mess; a Sylhet mess. Dacca had more than one mess; there was the Bikrampur mess and, if I do not forget, another the Manikganj mess. Of these, somehow, the Bikrampur, the Tippera and the Sylhet messes were most prominent in all kinds of public activities of those days among the student population of the metropolis.

Towards the close of my life in the university, 33 Mussalmanpara Lane, the Bikrampur mess; 28 Mechuabazar Street, the Tippera mess; 14 College Street, the Sylhet mess—these became something like landmarks in the life of the East Bengal students in Calcutta. 33 Mussalmanpara Lane came to receive the highest distinction because of its association, first with some of the most brilliant students of the university and next for its liberal social and religious views. Babu Ananda Mohan Bose, who subsequently went to Cambridge and was the first Indian Wrangler, passed his M.A. examination and Premchand Roychand Studentship, which carried a prize of 10,000 rupees in those days while he was an inmate of this mess. Babu Rajani Nath Roy, who subsequently rose to the position of Deputy Accountant-General, was also a member of this mess; and his success in the university examinations, in most of which he topped the list of successful students, shed considerable distinction on it. Babu Shashi Bhushan Datta was another brilliant student of the Calcutta University, who took his degree while he was a member of this mess. Dr Prasanna Kumar Roy, Babu Shreenath Datta, Sri Krishna Govinda Gupta, all of them distinguished students of the university, had intimate associations with the mess at 33 Mussalmanpara Lane. And their name and fame secured for it the distinction of being the premier students' mess in Calcutta in our time. Mussalmanpara Lane was also a very prominent centre of social and religious revolt associated with Babu Keshub Chandra Sen and his Brahmo Samaj of India in the seventies of the last century.

It was from this mess that Ananda Mohan Bose, Prasanna Kumar Roy, Shreenath Datta, Rajani Nath Roy and Aghore Nath Chattopadhyaya went to the Brahmo Samaj of India to be publicly initiated into Brahmoism by Keshub Chandra Sen, a few days previous to his departure for England in 1871. Babu Dwaraka Nath Ganguly, the pioneer of liberal female education in Bengal, and the editor of *Abala-Bandhaba* or the *Friend of the Weaker Sex*, who was later the Assistant Secretary of the Indian Association, also lived during the first few years of his life in Calcutta in 33 Mussalmanpara Lane. It turned out a larger number of distinguished graduates, many of whom made their mark in the public life of their province, and some, indeed, in that of the whole of India, than any other students' mess of our time. 33 Mussalmanpara Lane became thus almost a sign and symbol of culture and progress in our community in those days. The Tippera mess at 28 Mechuabazar Street and the Sylhet mess at 14 College Street came to considerable prominence after 1874, and particularly after the great schism in the Brahmo Samaj, due to the marriage of the eldest daughter of Keshub Chandra Sen to the minor Maharaja of Cooch Behar, on account of the intimate association of some of us with the new Brahmo movement under Sivanath Sastri.

The Presidency College was the premier college affiliated to the Calcutta University in my time. There were also a few private, that is, non-government colleges in the city. Three of these, the General Assembly's Institution, situated in Cornwallis Square or Hedua, as it was and is still known among our people; the Free Church Institution, which was situated in Nimtola Street, called also Duff College, having been established by Dr Duff; and the Cathedral Mission College, which stood in Mirzapur Street and occupied the building that still stands on the south-eastern corner of College Square and is occupied by the Calcutta Corporation as a district office—belonged to Protestant Christian Missions; the first two, as their name indicated, belonged to the Free Church of Scotland, and the third to the Church of England Mission. Then there was the St. Xavier's College, owned and conducted by the Jesuit Fathers. Doveton and La Martinere were meant

exclusively for the European boys, and as a rule, no Bengalee was admitted to these institutions, though I think, young Surendra Nath had his early education, preparatory to his going to England for the Indian Civil Service, in the former college, from which he passed his B.A. Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar had established the Metropolitan Institution a few years before I came to Calcutta; and this was the only college affiliated to the Calcutta University which was owned and managed by private individuals. When Sir George Campbell opened his campaign against higher English education and laid down the policy of gradually withdrawing from the field of this education, on the plea of releasing the funds of the State available for the promotion of education among the people, from collegiate education which benefited only a small section of the community, with a view to its employment in the cause of mass education, the opening of the Metropolitan Institution showed the way in which the new menace to higher education in the province might be fought and removed. Pandit Vidyasagar was not a very rich man, but he did not seek public help in this new educational venture. He had no faith in corporate action so far as his people were concerned. So he dedicated whatever he owned to the cause of higher English education, and practically staked his fortune and his position upon this enterprise. The fees charged in his Metropolitan Institution were much lower than those of the Presidency College; these were even less than what was charged by the missionary colleges. Poor students were helped with freeships and half-freeships as their condition justified. When I came to Calcutta, the Metropolitan Institution had already secured a high place among the Calcutta colleges. Tara Kishore Chaudhuri, who took a high position in the entrance examination from my school in Sylhet in my year (1874), and got a scholarship of rupees fifteen a month, went and joined the Metropolitan Institution, though I took my admission in the more expensive Presidency College.

Mr Sutcliffe was the Principal of the Presidency College at that time. In the early years of our university, the Principal of the Presidency College was, almost ex-officio, the Registrar of the Calcutta University. The most brilliant students in the province

therefore sought admission in this college if their means allowed it. Mr Sutcliffe's dual position, as Principal and University Registrar, offered certain advantages to the students of the Presidency College, which the students of the other colleges did not enjoy. Students who passed with distinction from the Presidency College stood greater chances of securing superior appointments under the government owing to Mr Sutcliffe's dual position than their brethren from the other colleges. Though the institution of special examinations for selecting candidates for the Subordinate Executive Service under the administration of Sir George Campbell somewhat restricted the field of Mr Sutcliffe's patronage, there were other appointments, notably in the newly organised Financial Department, that were practically in his gift. All these offered great temptations to ambitious young men to prefer the Presidency College to others. Though I had no such definite ambitions and was really not likely to succeed even if I had any, because I had passed the entrance examination in the third division, and was exceedingly ill-equipped for successful competition with the brilliant students of the university who flocked to this college, as a scholarship-holder I fancied it would be profitable and convenient for me to join it. So at the beginning of 1875 I found myself in this college.

Mr Tawney, who after his retirement from the Bengal Education Service was for many years in charge of the India Office Library in London, was the senior professor of English in the Presidency College at that time. But he was in charge of the B.A. and M.A. classes. Mr Bellet and Mr Hand, an Indo-European gentleman, and Babu Pyari Charan Sarkar, were Assistant Professors of English. They were in charge of the intermediate classes. Mr Bellet had the typical Anglo-Saxon features. He was a rather short man with a red face. He had, however, the reputation of being a good English scholar; and his teaching was very popular among the students. But he had rather a short temper, which brought some troubles to us all when I was reading in the first year class. He had abused some students of the second year class, and had, indeed, gone so far as to order one of them to stand up like a schoolboy. This gave very serious offence to

the whole class. The next day the second year students refused to attend his class. There was great uproar towards the last period; and almost all the students came out and stood at the foot of the stairs in an ugly angry mood. Mr Bellet, finding the situation rather more serious than what he had thought it was ever likely to be, took shelter in the Professors' Common Room, on one of the upper floors, and waited there for the college to be dismissed and the boys to go to their messes or homes. But he was disappointed. The college was dismissed at the usual hour, but the boys of the first and second year classes, and they were a large number, refused to disperse but waited in angry groups at the portico and the veranda through which the offending Professor would have to pass out. After about an hour and a half's waiting, Mr Bellet came down the stairs with another English Professor who was, I think, Mr Parry, who taught us Logic. As soon as Mr Bellet stepped down to the veranda, he was struck on the head by one of his enemies. His hat went rolling out into the portico, but his head was safe and sound. He tried to catch the youth who struck him, but as the whole body, gathered at the foot of the stairs, went to the help of this young man, he had to give up the pursuit as risky and hopeless.

Here the matter ended for that day. Mr Sutcliffe took up the enquiry next morning, and called a few students of the second year class to have the whole story from them. He was a very tactful person, and took an almost fatherly interest in the young men of his college. Though he did not openly show it, we all knew it, that the sympathies of the Principal were entirely with the boys; and it was even believed that he did not conceal from Mr Bellet his view of the indiscretion that he had been guilty of, in dealing with grown-up university students as if they were mere schoolboys. One young man, however, who had struck Mr Bellet, was punished with rustication; and the matter was allowed to rest here. Would any Principal of the Presidency College deal with an assault of this kind on a European Professor in this way today? How have the times changed since I was a student in the Presidency College sixty years ago!

Mr Sutcliffe was indeed exceedingly jealous of the prestige of the college and the honour of his boys. I heard it that one of his students got involved in a police case of some sort and the police officer in charge of the investigation went to his college to identify the youth and investigate into the complaint. As soon as the information of the presence of the police in his premises reached Mr Sutcliffe he came out and ordered the policeman off, declaring that he was the sole authority within the walls of his college, and neither a policeman nor a magistrate had any right to come here without his permission. This permission he sternly refused in the present case, and the officer was sent about his business without any opportunity of holding any inquiry into the case in the college, and as the matter was not very serious, the whole case was directly dropped. All this was in full consonance with the traditions of the British universities where Mr Sutcliffe had been brought up; and even the government dared not question the authority of the Principal in a matter of this kind. The prevailing idea in my young days among British officers of our Government Education Department was to build up our universities after the model of the British universities, and hence they were always exceedingly jealous of their independence in all matters affecting the training and discipline of the youths committed to their charge.

Mr Bellet and Babu Pyari Charan Sircar were my English Professors in the Presidency College. Mr Hand taught us History. And, oh, the history that we read! Taylor's *Ancient History* was our textbook. The first half of it was full of the so-called history of the Jews, collated from the Old Testament legend. The discoveries of modern scholars regarding the history of the Semitic peoples were then beyond the boldest imagination of the most diligent and imaginative historians of the ancient world. Taylor, if placed in the hands of our sons, would be thrown away as dry and incredible fancies dressed up as history! We were, however, on firmer and much pleasanter ground when reading the history of ancient Greece and Rome. I have no recollection of the abilities or the methods of Mr Hand. He stands out in my mind as a quiet and inoffensive gentleman, who was always kind to us. Mr Sutcliffe, the Principal, taught us Mathematics. He knew every scholarship-

holder by his name and face; and we had to be particularly diligent, or at least appear to be so, during his period; as otherwise we ran the risk of being called to his room, and we knew what that meant. Not that he was ever harsh or rude, but still we stood in fear of being called to see him in private. It always meant some admonition. Mr Bellet was a very good teacher; and, on the whole, a good man. But he was exceedingly reserved. He came to the class just as the hour struck, and without saying a word or casting a glance about him he would open his book and start his lecture. And though he rarely called for the register, very few students wanted to be absent from his class, so well did every one like his way of teaching. Pandit Nilmani Mukhopadhyaya, who subsequently became a Mahamahopadhyaya, was one of our Sanskrit professors. He was a very strict disciplinarian and used every day to call for the register to see which of the boys were present and who were playing the truant. But he was a very able teacher all the same, and we liked him for it. The other Sanskrit professor was Pandit Raj Krishna Banerjee, who was a great friend of Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar. He was a genial sort of person, and indulged in all sorts of witticisms during his lectures.

But the one man who had the greatest influence over forming my mind and character was Babu Pyari Charan Sircar, who was Assistant Professor of English in the Presidency College during my first year there. His was a magnetic personality. I cannot say how his personality affected my fellow-students, but it exerted a very great influence on me. He was a man of few words and I do not remember to have exchanged even half-a-dozen words with him during the five or six months that he taught us. But these few words were so gentle, and his whole being seemed to breathe such a sweet gentleness and sympathy for everybody that when he died after a brief spell of illness, I felt that I had lost an old and personal friend or dear relation. That was the first time in my life when the death of one who was not connected with me by blood or marriage or long association, touched me so deeply and drew out tears from my eyes. I had, though in a much lesser degree, the same sense of personal loss when, years after, the news of

Mr Sutcliffe's death reached us from England. But I had closer acquaintance with him than I had the good fortune of having with Babu Pyari Charan Sircar.

Babu Pyari Charan Sircar belonged to the first generation of English-educated Bengalees. He was about sixty at the time of his death in 1875. The Hindu College, which first offered opportunities of systematic education in the English language and literature and modern sciences and European histories and humanities to our people, was established in 1820, when Pyari Charan must have been a boy of eight or nine years. He was a pre-university man, and he passed what was known as the Senior Scholarship Examination with great distinction. Though he might have easily become a deputy magistrate, he chose the humbler but more sacred and responsible vocation of the schoolmaster, and dedicated all his culture and intelligence to the promotion of this new education among his people. His school primers, called the *First Book of Reading*, the *Second Book of Reading*, the *Third Book of Reading* and the *Fourth Book of Reading*, were the most approved textbooks in my school days; I do not know why had *Murray's English Spelling Book* been placed in my hands at the Missionary School at Sylhet in preference to Mr. Sircar's primer. Pyari Charan was not only an ardent educationist, but a very enthusiastic social reformer also, though of the more conservative school. It is said that he spent as much as nearly 70,000 rupees, practically the entire savings of the lifetime of a poor schoolmaster and an author, in promoting the cause of widow remarriage among higher caste Hindus, to which his friend Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar had consecrated his life. He was a very enthusiastic advocate of female education, and established a Girls' School at Chorebagan, the part of city of Calcutta where he lived and which contained his family homestead, and maintained it at his own expense. This school was continued after Babu Pyari Charan's death by his cousin, Dr Bhuban Mohon Sircar, who was a well-known citizen of the metropolis and a prominent member of the Calcutta Corporation up to the closing years of the last century. But Pyari Charan Sircar stood apart from the earlier generation of his English-educated countrymen

in his complete freedom from the drink habit that worked such havoc in their lives. He was, in my young days, the leader of a movement against this drink evil, to which Young Bengal had taken with as much avidity as they took to the study of Shakespeare and Milton. His advocacy of total abstinence found expression even through popular Bengali songs, one of which was current in and about Calcutta sixty years ago, and used to be sung by the masses. It declared: "Don't drink wines or spirits; Pyari Charan has asked you not to. The inside which is used only to pulses and vegetables, if it runs to excess in the matter of strong drinks, will not take long to land you at the home of Pluto." It was a comic song, supposed to have been composed by one who was addicted to the hemp-drug; and so the last line declared that "though it was dangerous to go by water (i.e. indulge in drink), there was no prohibition against travelling by land (i.e. smoking hemp or ganja)."

A typical anecdote revealing the personality of the man has come to my knowledge recently and may very profitably be recorded here. Dr Ganga Prasad Mukherjee, the well-known physician of Bhowanipur, father of Justice Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee, was a pupil of Pyari Charan Sircar while at school. Ganga Prasad had to pursue his studies under very great difficulties. His parents were not sufficiently well-off to be able to pay for the expenses of his education. When Ganga Prasad was sent up for the entrance examination he had not the wherewithal to pay his examination fees. He asked his elder brother, who was living in their village home, for these. He disposed of some of the household utensils to procure the amount and sent it to him. Unfortunately, poor Ganga Prasad lost the solitary ten-rupee note, and did not know what to do. A friend suggested that he might approach Dr Duff, who was known to help indigent boys in such matters; and Ganga Prasad went and saw him. Dr Duff was very much impressed with the honest and intelligent look of the young man and readily agreed to meet his want, but asked him to get a note from his headmaster. Ganga Prasad next came to Babu Pyari Charan and told him everything. Pyari Babu felt hurt at the fact Ganga Prasad had never told him of all this

before. "Couldn't I find rupees ten for you Ganga Prasad, that you had to go to Dr Duff for it? But since you have been to him, I cannot deprive him of the pleasure of helping you now; but please, whenever you are in difficulties in future, do not hesitate to come to me."

Over two hundred boys, I think, came and joined the Presidency College in my year; and so we had two sections in the first year class. Among my classmates here were Babu Bhutnath Chatterjee, who had stood first in the university entrance examination in 1874. Bhutnath went to the Engineering College, which was then a part of the Presidency College and was located in the same building in College Street, after passing his first examination in Arts. He entered government service. Amulya Charan Basu, who stood second, was also a classmate of mine in the Presidency College. He took his Law Degree and joined the Bar, but his health gave way and he has been living practically in retirement. Krishna Lal Datta, who after taking his M. A. Degree, found employment in the Finance Department, rose to the distinguished position of Assistant Controller and was a trusted officer in that department; Pankaj Kumar Chatterjee, who rose to be a District and Sessions Judge; Parvati Nath Datta, who secured a Gilchrist scholarship, went to England, took his B. Sc. Degree in London, and got a post in the Geological Survey of India; Babu Bhupendra Nath Basu, though of the same year, was not in our section. Babu Heramba Chandra Maitra, Principal, City College, was also in that section.

I do not know how things are now; but in my young days, students in the Calcutta colleges, who came from Bengal districts, and particularly in the Presidency College, which was patronised by the sons of the aristocracy of Calcutta, had a rather bad time of it, specially if they were very sensitive. Their local patois was the object of open ridicule by their more refined metropolitan fellow-students. Many of these *mufassil* boys were very shy and of a far more serious mood than the Calcutta boys; and they failed often times to freely mix with the latter or throw themselves into the playfulness of their Calcutta friends. The Calcutta boys made fun of their professors behind their back. Some of them,

including the very best indeed, wrote horrid satires on their teachers, and others instead of listening to their lectures, drew caricatures of them on their exercise books. Ganga Govinda Gupta, a younger brother of Sir Krishna Govinda Gupta, was specially distinguished in this art and he had quite a collection of caricatures in his exercise book. All these things seemed to hurt the more serious-minded East Bengal boys, and stood somewhat in the ways of their freely mixing with the metropolitan boys. But there were, of course, exceptions. Ganga Govinda was himself one, for he too was a *Bangal*, as his native district was Dacca. So was Krishna Lal, who came from Jessore. But generally the East Bengal or *Bangal* boys found it rather hard to put up with the ridicule of the Calcutta boys. Dacca boys were too proud of their own district and of their old traditions as one-time capital of Bengal to accommodate themselves to the new conditions; so while we Sylhet boys put forth strenuous efforts to give up our local patois as soon as we came to Calcutta and learn the idiom and intonations of the metropolis, our Dacca friends kept up the habit of talking in their district patois as a matter of parochial pride and patriotism; and this tended to keep them away somewhat from the general life of the Calcutta students. This was, however, helpful to them, because they were able, owing to their aloofness, to devote themselves with greater diligence to their studies and thereby often times to beat their rivals belonging to the metropolis in the university examinations. As these students from East Bengal had fewer interests besides their studies, they were looked down upon by the Calcutta boys as 'book-worms'.

My first summer vacation took me back home to Sylhet in May 1875. That was, however, the saddest period of my young life. The morning after I reached Sylhet, my youngest sister, a lovely little child, about two years and a half old, the only one of my many brothers and sisters who survived the early weeks of their lives and who therefore created a great hope in our mind that she would live and grow into youth and age, died on my arms! This so upset my poor mother, who was then in a delicate condition, that she wished to kill herself by madly striking her limbs with a pestle. We snatched it away from her hands, but not

before serious harm had been done. Fever and what was taken to be dysentery followed. She was ill of it for nearly two months. This detained me at home even after the recess in my college was over. When, however, she was confined without any mishap, both the doctor and the *kaviraj*, who were attending her, declared that her life was now safe; and the next evening freed from all further anxiety on her account, I got out of our house, after nearly two months, to enquire about the date of the next steamer for Narayanganj. On my return, I found my mother in a state of semi-collapse due, as I understood afterwards when I had gathered some knowledge of mid-wifery and female diseases, to internal haemorrhage, to which she succumbed in an hour or so.

Ever since I was a boy, I had often times tried to mentally realise what my condition would be in case I lost my mother; and even during her last illness, when her life was hanging as it were by a slender thread, I had always felt that I would not be able to live without her. But the extreme anguish with which I had thought of her death during her lifetime did not overcome me when she actually died, and that so unexpectedly! I was as calm as a block of cold stone. I went about coolly making preparations for the funeral. Not a drop of tear escaped my eyes. Not a sigh escaped my lips. Looking back upon all this I am amazed at my insensibility; and even sometimes question if I really had so little love for my mother. But though I set fire to the funeral pyre on which was placed her body without any hesitation or pain, I completely broke down the next morning when I woke and saw my father shedding silent tears by my bedside.

My father was visibly upset by this bereavement; and the sight of his desolation made me suppress my own grief. In the usual course mother's *sradh* or the first monthly death service should have taken place at Poil, or, in any case, in Sylhet. Considering my father's position, it would have to be performed upon a more or less grand scale, marked by larger presents to the Brahmins all over the district, feeding of hundreds of these people as well as of friends, relations and neighbours, and numberless unbidden guests, who gather from far and near at the news of a big *sradh*. My father felt that he could not stand all

this in his present mood and was also unwilling to spend such a large sum of money upon so sad an occasion. So he decided to send me back to Calcutta with our family priest, and have the ceremony performed on the banks of the Ganges, which was considered far more meritorious from the ritualistic point of view than the most costly ceremony elsewhere. So within about ten days of my mother's death, I left for Calcutta in a country boat, with my *Dada* Dagoo, another retainer of my father, a cousin of mine and the priest. I left this boat at Dacca and took another which brought me to Goalundo. It was the first week of July, and the monsoon was in full swing; and the Padma was in her worst mood. But in those days our people were used to travelling by country boats, and nobody thought anything of crossing the boisterous Padma or the angry Meghna in country rafts. The Meghna near Bhairab was very bad when we came near it; and we had to wait for two days, in a small canal on the other side, until the weather had become calm. That was all the inconvenience we suffered. A few hours or sometimes even two or three days' wait was all that people travelling by country boats had to put up with in those days. But they had steadier nerves too!

I was at that time in that psychological state which can only be described as a queer mixture of belief and unbelief. I still appealed to Durga in my extremity, as when my mother was in her last sick-bed. It was really an appeal to the Unseen to which the primitive mind always turns when the seen fails it. But I had absolutely no faith in the virtue of the disciplines to which I was made to submit on the death of my mother during the period of mourning, which was, in our case, full one month or thirty days. I had to live on one cooked meal a day. It consisted of boiled rice, cooked by myself, and ghee without any salt or other accompaniments as of *dal* or vegetables. I could take milk either by itself, which I did at night, or with boiled rice in the morning, but without sugar. I could not cook my rice in metallic pots or pans but use only earthen pots, and it was to be cooked with one single bundle of fuel, and I had to pour this food out on small *dongas* or boat-shaped vessels made of the bark of fresh-cut

plantain or banana trees. This took away whatever natural taste there was in hot or steaming rice and ghee. Then, having poured out my food on this *donga* I had to carry a portion in another *donga* and give it to the crows; and I could not touch my food until some crow had come and taken this *bali* or offering made to its kind. If through any chance no crow came and ate my offering, I had to go without my own food for that day. I had to sleep on the ground, on a piece of mat and could not change my clothes, but had to use the same loin-cloth in which I had my bath allowing it to dry on my body. At night I could not lay my head on a pillow, though I could have a blanket of pure wool as a protection against cold or draught. I could not play or engage in any sort of merriment, even so much as witnessing it. For the first four days, I had to perform some kind of minor *sradh*, making offerings of rice-cakes to the dead. This had to be repeated on the tenth day. All these seemed to my sceptic mind to be meaningless magic and not deserving of being honoured by reasonable and educated people!

My father felt the hardship to which these mourning rites and disciplines subjected my young flesh; and one day, as he sat chatting in our Sylhet house with a Brahmin, who though not quite a Pandit, that is, a title-holder or proprietor of a *tol* or Sanskrit school, was yet considered a bit learned in Brahminical laws, and was held therefore in considerable respect by our elders, he incidentally said, in my presence, that if I found it difficult to take my rice and milk without sugar, there was no harm in my taking ripe plantains of the purer variety, which we offered to the gods. To this without actually being asked, this revered Brahmin readily assented. That was a way of my father with these Brahmins. He would himself make some decision on points of ceremonial conduct, and then express it in the presence of some of these Brahmins, who he knew fairly well would not care to contradict it. So from that day forward, I was allowed to take plantains, and this considerably relieved the austerities of my mourning.

Personally I did not attach any value at all to these austerities. My grief for my mother was a thing too intimate and sacred to be

paraded in this way; this is how like so many of my rationalist friends, I looked upon the whole business. What put me up particularly against these was that instead of being a spontaneous expression of my grief, these were superimposed upon me by an outside authority, which hurt my conceit of personal liberty. Years after when I lost my father, I followed these same hardships freely and of my own will and pleasure, as a mark of respect, not as an expression though of my grief, for him. I know, or think I know, much better today. The entire meaning of these has changed to me with the revelation of a new philosophy of Man which I may, if it pleases God, discuss another day, when and if I am permitted to write of my later years. But as a young man of seventeen, I had no appreciation of these old disciplines; and though through fear of offending my father, I submitted to them outwardly, my reason revolted all the same against this meaningless interference with my personal freedom.

So, when I found myself in Calcutta, out of my father's ken, with only our old family priest and my *Dada* and a cousin to look after me, I commenced to disregard these rules altogether. I could not come and take up my quarters in our mess with all these people. So we went to a place in Beliaghata where a few merchants and traders from our parts lived, as they do even today, and found a couple of rooms there. Here I used to have my morning meal of boiled rice and ghee and milk and ripe plantains; but in the afternoon, I used to walk daily to our mess in Madan Baral's Lane, and as I passed along Bow Bazar Street, I provided myself with boiled eggs and crabs and *poories*, on which I had my evening meal. I do not know if I ought to feel sorry for it. But if my mother lived to now, and if I lost her today, though I would not certainly call in the Brahmin to perform the *sradh*, I would scrupulously observe the old rules prescribed for the month of mourning for my people by orthodox Hinduism. That would be an act of free choice on my part; and I would do it because I seem to understand the inwardness of these disciplines now better than I did then.

I performed my mother's *sradh* on the banks of the Ganges in strict conformity with Hindu rites; and for nearly a year after I

regularly performed the monthly *sradh* also, under the direction of a priest who belonged to our district and who was living in Calcutta at that time ministering to the Hindu residents from our parts. Towards the close of the year, and before the day of the first anniversary of my mother's death came I had openly rebelled against the old faith and society, and thus gave it up. That was the first cause of open rupture between father and son.

In due course, I would have to sit for my first examination in Arts in 1876; but towards the close of that academic year, a couple of months before the examination, I had an attack of chickenpox. Sundari Mohan nursed me through it, utterly regardless of the consequences; for chickenpox, though generally not dangerous, is exceedingly catching. So he had it in a much severer form than what I had. It was now my turn to nurse him. Thus I missed my examination. Sundari Mohan had at that time left the Presidency College, and having passed the F.A. had taken his admission into the Medical College. Medical College students had no winter vacation, like those reading in the General or Arts Department of the University. So even after he got well, and though I had nothing to do in Calcutta until the opening of the next session after Christmas, I wanted to spend the vacation here. But news of my illness had made my father very nervous and as he insisted upon my going home, I left Sundari Mohan as soon as he was able to take care of himself, and went home.

It was rather a sacrifice. Because that was the time when the Prince of Wales (the late King Edward VII) was timed to come to Calcutta. The whole city was busy with preparations for the royal reception. Triumphal arches were being put up at every important crossing along the streets which he was expected to pass during his visit to the metropolis. The entire population was excited with the coming *tamasha*. Naturally enough, I did not quite like leaving all this and go to our small town at this time. But my father's wishes had to be respected, specially since my mother's death, six months previously, he had really no one except myself and my sister, who was, however, living with her husband at Silchar. But though I did not participate in the festivities of the Prince's visit to Calcutta, it led to certain events that had a far-

reaching influence upon my life and character. But I must defer that story to another chapter, in which I shall, God willing, relate the story of how I came to join the Brahmo Samaj.

That I could not sit for my first examination in Arts in 1876, was not at all a very unwelcome thing to me personally, though my father was naturally disappointed at it. The fact is, I had done little or nothing, in the way of my college studies, during the two years that I was in the Presidency College. As a scholarship-holder, I had to regularly attend Mr Sutcliffe's lectures. He was very particular about us, and noticed whenever anyone of his scholarship-holders was absent from the class. Therefore, though not for love of Mathematics, which was his subject, but for fear of losing his good opinion, if not the scholarship, I had perforce to be in my place during his period. I attended Mr Bettet's class, and Babu Pyari Charan Sircar's for love of the things they taught. Pandit Nilmani Nyayalankara used invariably to have a roll-call everyday he came to our class, and I could not escape him without losing my stipend for the day. Thus about a couple of hours everyday and some days only an hour, I used to be in my class. The rest of the time I played the truant, and as there were no railings round the compound of the Presidency College like they have now, I used to run out and spend my time in a book-shop that stood just a few paces off, somewhere near the place where Harrison Road cuts College Street on the opposite side of that street, and devote the hours when I should have been in my class in miscellaneous reading, both Bengali and English.

The name of that bookshop was Canning Library. It was owned by Babu Yogesh Chandra Bannerjee, who was a very genial sort of man, and was somehow very friendly towards me, and let me have the run of his whole stock of books among which I freely rummaged for hours and hours together. I was consequently very ill-prepared for my examination, and the attack of chickenpox was a veritable God-send to me; for it saved me from my father's angry remonstrance at wasting my time and his money in this way in Calcutta.

Next year I went and joined the Cathedral Mission College, as the allowance from my father was not sufficient, now that I

had no scholarship to pay the heavier fees of the premier college of the university. I appeared at the first examination in Arts in 1877 from this college but got plucked in Mathematics. I tried another chance the next year; but owing to differences with my father over religious and social convictions, he had stopped my remittance, and I was in difficulties financially for more than six months. Though he did, after all, send all the arrears towards the close of the year, that enabled me to appear once more at the examination, but that did not help me to make up lost time. And this time also I got plucked.

This was the end of my career in the university. The breach between father and son had become by this time too wide to hope for an early reconciliation. I could no longer depend upon him for my expenses. I had, therefore, no option but to look out for some employment. A friend who knew me well, and had confidence in my general knowledge of English language and literature, recommended me for the post of headmaster and teacher of English in an Entrance School at Cuttack, owned by a local Brahmo gentleman. He agreed to take me on trust, and by the beginning of the year 1879, I found myself in the responsible position of the headmaster of this school, called the Cuttack Academy.

Chapter II

THE BIRTH OF OUR NEW NATIONALISM

The years 1875-1878, which synchronised with my life in the university in Calcutta, saw the birth of our new nationalism. This new Nationalism had its origin in a renaissance in Bengali literature brought about by our contact with European thought. Bankim Chandra was, in a special sense, the prophet of this renaissance. The *Bangadarshan* started in 1873-74 was the organ of it. Bankim Chandra gathered around him a group of intellectuals, who were the finest flowers of the Calcutta University. Hem Chandra Banerjee was the poet of this renaissance. Raj Krishna Banerjee was its historian. Akshay Chandra Sarker, Taraprasad Chatterjee and Chandra Nath Basu were its essayists; while Bankim Chandra, combining in himself the novelist, the historian, the essayist and the critic, was the centre and organising genius of this renaissance. The *Bangadarshan* school did for contemporary Bengalee thought and literature what the French Encyclopaedists did for 18th century European thought and French literature. Of course, the *Bangadarshan* had been preceded by the *Tattwabodhini Patrika* on the one side, and the Rev. Dr K.M. Banerjee's researches in and translations from ancient Hindu philosophy on the other. The *Tattwabodhini* represented the Brahmo Samaj movement, revived under the leadership of Devendra Nath Tagore. Practically all the leading Bengalee men of letters of the period were associated with the *Tattwabodhini*. Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and Bhudeb Mukherjee were both on the editorial board of this paper. Its chief writers were Akshay Kumar Datta, who was the editor, Rajnarain Bose and Ram

Chandra Vidyabagish. While Akshay Kumar's studies and writings were mainly inspired by the scientific spirit and investigations of middle 19th century European culture, Rajnarain Bose, Ram Chandra Vidyabagish and the other regular contributors of the *Tattwabodhini* were more interested in theological speculations and the revival of the ancient wisdom of the *Upanishads* and the higher Hinduism of the *Vedanta*.

The generation of Bengalee youths to which I belonged came, however, in more direct contact with the *Bangadarshan* than with the *Tattwabodhini* school. The *Tattwabodhini* was a bit too serious and learned for our youthful minds; while the *Bangadarshan* with its fictions and poetry and satire as well as historical and social essays, appealed more powerfully to us. I had, if I remember aright, read Bankim Chandra's *Durgesnandini* and *Mrinalini* even before I came to Calcutta. *Durgesnandini* quickened my earliest patriotic sentiments. Our sympathies were all entirely with Birendra Sinha, the Hindu chief of Gad-Mandaran; and the court scene, wherein the Moslem invader was stabbed through his heart by Bimala, one of the wives of the chief of Gad-Mandaran, made a profound impression upon my youthful imagination. Among English novelists Sir Walter Scott was a favourite of our generation. We read his poems, 'Marmion' and 'Lady of the Lake', in our college curriculum. Outside we devoured literally many of his Waverly novels. His *Ivanhoe* was most popular with us. And in Bankim Chandra's *Durgesnandini* we found a strange similitude with *Ivanhoe*. Bankim Chandra at once rose in our estimation as Sir Walter Scott of Bengal.

Michael Madhusudan had preceded the *Bangadarshan* in the history of the new Bengalee literature. He had liberated Bengalee poetry from the old fetters of Sanskrit prosody, or more correctly speaking, of ancient Bengalee epics and lyrics. He was the first to introduce blank verse in our literature. The wealth of imagination and the almost immeasurable store of words in Madhusudan's *Meghanad-Badh* created a new pride in our hearts, the pride of race, and we commenced to compare him with Milton.

Hem Chandra, however, was our special favourite. The intense patriotic passion that breathed through his poems captured our youthful minds in a way which no other Bengalee poems had done. The new generation of English-educated Bengalees had already commenced to provoke a conflict in the country. Hem Chandra was, in a special sense, the poet of this new conflict and of the new racial self-respect and sensitive patriotism born of it.

Side by side with all these, the Brahmo Samaj, under Keshub Chunder Sen, had proclaimed a new gospel of personal freedom and social equality, which reacted very powerfully upon this infant national consciousness and the new political life and aspirations of Young Bengal. Keshub's controversies with the Christian missionaries were widely read and greatly enjoyed not only by his own followers and co-religionists but by the entire body of our English-educated countrymen. In his victories over the Christian missionaries in these controversies, Keshub's countrymen, even outside his church and community, felt a genuine pride, which powerfully fed their national conceit. Keshub's English visit and the way he was lionised by the British public and the British press also reacted very powerfully upon the mind of his people in India.

The old paralysing sense of superiority of ~~their~~ new political masters over them was visibly replaced by a new ~~self~~-confidence in our educated countrymen in consequence of Keshub's successful missionary propaganda in England. All these had worked together to create a new mental and moral atmosphere in Calcutta, if indeed, not all over Bengal, when I arrived from my distant native district of Sylhet and entered the Presidency College.

I came to Calcutta, as already stated, at the beginning of 1875. The latter end of 1874 Ananda Mohan Bose had come back from England, having taken honours in Mathematics at Cambridge and having been classed as one of the Wranglers of his year, standing, if I remember aright, ninth in the list. Ananda Mohan's success at Cambridge had also contributed materially to our new pride of race. The very first public act of Ananda Mohan was the establishment of the Calcutta Students' Association. Surendra Nath, after his compulsory retirement from

the Indian Civil Service, had gone to England in the hope that the justice, which had been denied to him by the British Government in India, would be granted by the higher authorities in England. In this he was, however, sorely disappointed. Not only did the Secretary of State for India refuse to review the decision of the Government of India and reinstate Surendra Nath in his position in the Indian Civil Service but even the Benchers of the Inn at which he kept his terms and whose law examinations he had successfully passed, refused to call him to the Bar. Thus disappointed Surendra Nath came back home to Calcutta in the middle of 1875, not knowing really how to obtain a living, and yet, as he puts it in his autobiography, "do some useful work for the country".

Sir George Campbell was Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal during the early seventies. He was not friendly to the new English-educated middle class in the province. He thought that they were gradually becoming a menace to the British authority in the country. He initiated therefore a new education policy or, more correctly speaking, tried to emphasise a neglected principle enunciated in the Education Despatch of 1854, popularly known as Sir John Wood's Despatch, in which the Directors of the British East India Company had laid down the education policy of their administration in India. This despatch, which was at one time regarded by our people as their educational Magna Charta, had urged upon the government that instead of directly taking charge of higher education, they should encourage leaders of Indian society to increasingly take it in their own hands and invite private enterprise to establish and manage these new schools and colleges. In fact, the earliest initiative in introducing English education among the people of this province had been taken, not by the Government of the East India Company, but by the leaders of the Indian community themselves. The first English college in Bengal, the Hindu College, was thus established not by the government but by the Hindu leaders of Calcutta, including the most orthodox among them. Gradually, however, the government commenced directly to take the higher education of the people into their own hands. They required a body of administrators

from among the natives of the country, who would be able to assist the English officers in their work, both judicial and executive. In pursuance of this policy, a number of colleges came into existence in Bengal. Sir George Campbell realised the menace which the yearly increasing out-turn of English-educated young men from these colleges offered to the undisputed authority of the British rulers of the country. The time had come, he thought, when this higher education must be restricted. Sir George therefore proposed to abolish some of the *mufassil* colleges and divert the funds spent on them to the promotion of primary education among the masses. This new educational policy naturally roused fierce opposition from the leaders of the English-educated community in Bengal. While, however, the politicians and publicists indulged in protests and abuses, Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, realising the practical futility of these, resolved to establish and maintain out of his own resources, a college in Calcutta, under the name of the Metropolitan Institution. Its object was to find means of higher collegiate education to the youth of Bengal at such cost as was within their means. The Metropolitan Institution commenced, from the very beginning to attract large numbers of students. Pandit Vidyasagar had been an intimate friend of Surendra Nath's father, Dr Durga Charan Banerjee. Naturally enough, therefore he took almost a parental interest in young Surendra Nath and had been largely instrumental in sending him to England to compete for the Indian Civil Service. When in 1875, after his unsuccessful attempt to get reinstated in the Indian Civil Service, Pandit Vidyasagar, seeing him stranded in Calcutta, invited him to the chair of English in the Metropolitan Institution. It was here that Surendra Nath first came into close association with the students of Calcutta and at once became the most favourite leader of the youth of Bengal.

On his way back from England Ananda Mohan had spent a few days in Bombay to study the educational and social institutions of the Western capital. In Bombay he found an association of youthful students, which was practically leading a new movement of female education among the middle classes of the Hindu community. From Bombay he brought the idea of organising a

similar movement among the students of his own university. Within a few days of his return to Calcutta Ananda Mohan established the Calcutta Students' Association. Surendra Nath almost immediately after his appointment as professor in the Metropolitan Institution joined Ananda Mohan in the leadership of this Students' Association and became at once the very life and soul of it. Ananda Mohan continued to be the President of the Association, but Surendra Nath's eloquence and burning patriotism lent to it a new strength and inspiration. Surendra Nath's first appearance on the platform of the Students' Association at once established his claims to the leadership of our new youth movement,

Keshub Chunder and the Brahmo Samaj had no doubt preceded Surendra Nath in the leadership of Young Bengal. Keshub Chunder's appeal was exclusively to the religious and moral sensibilities of the rising generation of his English-educated countrymen. But the education which they received in their schools and colleges had very seriously unsettled their faith not only in the traditional religions of their own people but more or less in all religion. The Brahmo leader was able therefore to touch comparatively a small section of the rising youths of his country. They might be the most serious-minded among them, but they were never a very large class; and though they exerted a very considerable moral influence over their fellow countrymen, and set a very high standard of personal character and social service to their generation, a very large section of the educated intelligentsia of their time was left more or less cold by the Brahmo propaganda. In fact, Keshub Chunder had almost as many detractors among Young Bengal of his day as he had admirers. The acceptance of the Brahmo ideals of life involved very serious sacrifices. It led to separation from home and family, excommunication from society and, in many cases, loss of patrimony. There was as yet hardly any Brahmo community), and those who joined the Samaj found themselves in more or less complete social isolation. All these inevitably deterred many people who had the fullest intellectual sympathy with the new movement of religious and social reform from openly throwing their lot into it. Their very inability to be true to their convictions

gradually led them to set up a kind of moral defence of their inner weakness by openly repudiating the Brahmo ideals and holding up the conduct and conversations of those who were loyal to these ideals at such sacrifice to public ridicule. For all these reasons Keshub Chunder's preachings affected a comparatively small section of the youthful intellectuals of his time.

Surendra Nath, however, brought a new message and inspiration of freedom. His appeal was predominantly political. He did no doubt, specially in the earlier years of his political leadership, combine social with political idealism and sought to draw the inspiration of both from religion. But the emphasis of his teachings was, all the same, far more on political liberty than on personal and social freedom. Politics did not involve in those days any sufferings or sacrifices. The political authorities in the country did not take our infant political freedom movement very seriously. They saw no menace to their authority in it. The whole thing was, more or less, as a pastime, though certainly the more serious minded of our youthful intellectuals did not consciously pursue it as such. Our new politics was on the plane of intellection only. The political ideal possessed our mind, its contemplation satisfied our emotions; but there was as yet no call for any strenuous practical political action such as might bring us into open conflict with the government and lead to those personal consequences that follow every movement of revolt against constituted and organised political authority. For all these reasons, Surendra Nath's political propaganda gathered a much larger following than that of the religious and social revolt of Keshub Chunder Sen and the Brahmo Samaj.

In fact, by the time when Surendra Nath entered upon his life's mission the Brahmo Samaj had already commenced to lose popular sympathies owing to the new doctrinal developments in it. The educated mind in Bengal was still under the influence of 19th century rationalistic thought of Europe. Scepticism and materialism were the loudest notes in the intellectual life of young Bengal. Hume and Spencer and Comte were, more or less, the leaders of thought of the new English-educated classes of the

province. Keshub, and before him Devendra Nath, had to fight this spirit of European scepticism and rationalism that denied sometimes the existence of God, and even when it did not do so, openly repudiated the duty of worship and the necessity of prayer. The intellectual movement outside the Brahmo Samaj in those days was completely without any religious inspiration or reference. Devendra Nath, and after him Keshub, both tried to fight this new spirit of irreligion by filiating their movements to the new Intuitionalist School of middle 19th century European thought. The implications of this intuition had not as yet been fully realised. These came out subsequently, mainly through the teachings of M'Cosh and Flint. The earlier intuitionism in our country, as also perhaps to a very large extent even in Europe, was intensely subjective. It set up individual reason and intuition as the ultimate and absolute standard of judgment in the determination of what was true and right. The opponents of the Brahmo Samaj tried to expose the logic of this subjective intuitionism and present the religion of the Brahmos as 'a conjugation of the verb to think'. Dr Dyson was one of the most powerful Christian protagonists against the propaganda of the Brahmo Samaj and its leader Keshub Chunder Sen. And in a criticism of the Brahmo doctrine he described the religion of the Brahmos as a conjugation of the verb to think. 'I think, we think, you think, he thinks, they think', this, declared Professor Dyson, was Brahmoism. This parody of the religion of the Brahmo Samaj was enjoyed much by the Hindu opponents of Keshub Chunder Sen, and particularly by that large and increasing body of our youthful intellectuals who, though they had no faith in the religion of their fathers, yet found it impossible, as much from intellectual objections as from considerations of personal interest and social expediency, to accept the teachings of the Brahmo Samaj. The Brahmo Samaj was the butt of ridicule of this large class of our people. When Keshub developed a new theology, built partly upon the Intuitionalist School of European philosophy and partly upon Carlyle's Hero Worship and Emerson's Representative Men, and indirectly commenced to claim for himself and the Brahmo missionaries associated with him some sort of special, if not

supernatural, authority as the ordained messengers of a New Dispensation, the old unpopularity of the Brahmo Samaj was considerably increased. These doctrinal developments in the theology and church government of Keshub Chunder Sen naturally commenced to turn the bowels of the educated Bengalee youths, fed upon prevailing European rationalism and scepticism, against the Brahmo Samaj. This was the general intellectual and moral atmosphere and environment in the midst of which Surendra Nath opened his new political propaganda.

The spirit of freedom, quickened by contact with modern European thought and history, throbbing under the new impulses implanted by the idealism of the French Revolution, was abroad. It was first organised among us in the movement of religious and social revolt led by the Brahmo Samaj. Though the influence of the Brahmo Samaj had commenced to wane, for the various reasons already indicated, this spirit of freedom was still dominating the educated intelligentsia of Bengal. Surendra Nath found a new and larger scope for its fulfilment in the political propaganda which he initiated. Surendra Nath had studied, while in England, the history of the movements of national emancipation in modern Europe. These studies had revealed to him the very important place which the educated youths of these countries held in the freedom movement of their own land. He had been particularly impressed by the movement of 'Young Italy' led by Joseph Mazzini. Surendra Nath started upon his public career by trying to follow in the steps of Mazzini and organised a youth movement in his own province. He had come back from his second visit to England as an outcaste among the older and respectable members of his own people. In those days men who were in the black books of the government were shunned by the leaders of their own community. The existing political and other public organisations in Calcutta would not touch Surendra Nath even with a pair of tongs. But for Pandit Vidyasagar, who was all his life a man of sturdy independence, and who never burnt incense as much to the political masters of his country as to the idols of the marketplace among his people, Surendra Nath would have to live all his life as a political outcaste. By appointing Surendra

Nath to be a professor in the Metropolitan Institution, Pandit Vidyasagar not only found him a congenial occupation but also opened the way to his future by bringing him into living contact with the student population of Calcutta. Surendra Nath found in the Students' Association, established a few months previous to his return home from England, his first public platform.

This Students' Association had already drawn to itself the most prominent graduates and undergraduates of those days. The first secretary of it was Babu Nanda Krishna Bose, who had topped the list of successful candidates at the previous B.A. examination. Nanda Krishna Bose, after taking his final degree, entered the public service. When as a result of the agitation started by the Indian Association against the lowering of the age-limit from 21 to 19 of the Indian Civil Service Examination, the Secretary of State for India sought to make a compromise with this growing feeling against his new regulation and opened a way for qualified Indian youths to appointments in the higher executive and judicial services hitherto exclusively held by covenanted civilians, Nanda Krishna Bose was the very first to be appointed to this new Statutory Civil Service. He gradually rose to the position of a district and sessions judge, and though drawing a smaller salary, exercised all the rights and held all the powers of his office just as the British covenanted civilian. Mr Surya Kumar Agasti was also one of the most brilliant students of the university in the middle seventies of the last century. Entering the university in 1874 he took the first place in all the examinations. If I remember aright, he succeeded Nanda Krishna Bose as Secretary of the Students' Association, and passing out of the University he too found a place in the Statutory Civil Service, and gradually rose to the position of a district magistrate. Mr Byomkesh Chakravarty, another of the most brilliant products of the university, was also at one time associated with the Students' Association as its Secretary. Mr Chakravarty, entered the Educational Service, and held for some time the chair of Mathematics in the Ravenshaw College, Cuttack. When the government provided for higher scientific education in agriculture for qualified Indian young men, by founding a few state scholarships

tenable at the College of Agriculture at Cirencester in England, Mr Byomkesh Chakravarty was in the first batch of these agricultural scholars. He availed himself, however, of this opportunity not only to study at Cirencester but at the same time also to keep his terms at one of the Inns of Court in London; and, before returning home, he had himself called to the Bar. Mr Girish Chandra Bose, Mr Ambica Charan Sen and Mr Dwijadas Dutta were contemporaries of Mr Chakravarty at Cirencester. The government, while founding these scholarships for advanced and scientific agricultural studies in England, did not make any definite provision for finding adequate opportunities for these trained agriculturists in their own service. It was, I think, some years later that the present Agricultural Department was organised under a Director of Agriculture. The first batch of these agricultural state-scholars returned home from Cirencester without any covenant with the government. The government was under no obligation to provide adequate places for them in the administration. They were also under no obligation to serve the government. It was, therefore, easy and natural for Mr Chakravarty, who saw he had better prospects in the Bar than in the Education Department of the government, where he had been previously serving, to join the Bar. He gradually rose to be one of the leading members of his profession. Mr Girish Chandra Bose also did not return to his place in the Education Department on coming home from Cirencester, but found a more congenial occupation as proprietor and principal of the present Bangabasi College in Calcutta. Mr Ambica Charan Sen, on his return from Cirencester, was appointed to the Statutory Civil Service and rose to be a district and sessions judge. Mr Dwijadas Datta was found a place in the Subordinate Executive Service and was for some little time a deputy magistrate, but the duties of the office did not fit in quite with his mental constitution and moral temperament, and he soon reverted to the educational service, and after serving in some of our *mufassil* colleges, he was finally posted to the chair of agriculture when it was founded in the Government Engineering College at Shibpur. All these, with the exception of Mr Ambica Charan Sen

who took his degree from Dacca, were directly or indirectly brought up under the new influence created by the Calcutta Students' Association. Mr Ambica Charan Sen had, however, received his baptism in the new Freedom Movement in the country in the Brahmo Samaj of which he had been a most enthusiastic and loyal adherent from his early youth. In fact, the inspiration of freedom was then in the air and as the Brahmo Samaj on the one side organised this inspiration in a movement of religious and social reform and reconstruction, so our Students' Association organised it in another way, among a wider class of the rising youth of the province.

Indeed, in Surendra Nath's early propaganda there was an unmistakable undercurrent of religious and social idealism also. His first lecture from the platform of the Students' Association was on the 'Rise of the Sikh Power in the Punjab'. It was held in the Hindu School Theatre. This Hindu School Theatre was in those days practically our only public hall. There was also the Medical College Theatre. The Medical College Theatre was, it seems to me, not open to everybody. It drew a more select and even aristocratic audience. Keshub Chunder Sen's earlier public addresses were all delivered there. The Students' Association was a more democratic body. The Medical College Theatre somehow or other seems to have been not as freely open to its meetings as the Hindu School Theatre. Indeed, many of the more popular public lectures in those days used to be delivered here. Babu Rajnarain Bose's lecture in Bengali on *E Kal Se O Kal* as well as Pandit Ramgati Nyayaratna's address on the 'History of Bengali Literature' was delivered in this theatre. Surendra Nath's first public appearance was also on this platform under the auspices of the Students' Association. The materials for his lecture on the 'Rise of the Sikh Power' were no doubt drawn from English sources, particularly from Malcolm's *History of the Sikhs*. But the Sikh movement was practically unknown to us. Our school textbooks on Indian history did no doubt notice the story of the Sikhs in connection with Ranjit Singh. But these references had no inspiration for us. Surendra Nath for the first time presented the Sikh movement as really a movement of freedom, first against

the current ceremonialism and Brahminical domination of the Hindu community; second, against the oppression of the Moguls, who tried to crush a movement of religious and spiritual freedom by the organised brute force of an alien government; and lastly, against British aggression. British historians of the Sikhs had glossed over the wonderful military skill and valour of the Sikh army, describing signal defeats of the British as draws, and what were really draws as defeats of the Sikhs. Surendra Nath in his address on the 'Rise of the Sikh Power in the Punjab' exposed the unreliable character of British historians and painted in burning words the justice of the Sikh cause, the deathless devotion of the Sikh people to their *Khalsa* or commonwealth and the signal defeats which they inflicted on the British at Chilianwala and Gujerat. Our school histories never confessed frankly these defeats. This revelation of the history of the Sikhs made a very powerful appeal to our infant patriotism and lent new strength and even bitterness to the anti-British feeling that had already commenced to possess our youthful minds. I was not present at this first lecture of Surendra Nath, but those who were carried with them from this meeting a new patriotic fervour. A friend characterised this lecture of Surendra Nath's as creating, by deafening rounds of applause that followed in quick succession his rapidly flowing periods, almost a literal storm about College Square. Surendra Nath's position as the most powerful orator of his generation was at once established by this performance. His next appearance on the public platform was at Bhowanipore in the hall of the London Missionary Society's Institution. The subject of this lecture was 'Chaitanya'. As in his first lecture Surendra Nath brought to us the inspiration of the freedom movement among the Sikhs, so in this lecture he brought to us the message of the great socio-religious reform movement of Shree Chaitanya, which more or less revolutionised Bengalee thought and society of the 16th century. The Vaishnavic movement in Bengal was then under a cloud. Brahminism had literally devoured the Vaishnavic cult and culture. People had little knowledge and less appreciation of the lofty social idealism and humanism of the message of the Mahaprabhu. The literature of Bengal

Vaishnavism was more or less inaccessible to the newly educated intelligentsia of our people. To them Vaishnavism presented only a highly emotional cult with an excessive sensual and erotic emphasis in its devotional culture. Even Bankim Chandra held it responsible for the loss of manhood of the Bengalee people. It had reduced piety to erotic excitement and materially contributed to the physical and moral deterioration of the race. The Brahmo Samaj under the leadership of Keshub Chunder Sen, and particularly through the inspiration of Bijay Krishna Goswami, had been slowly recovering the higher Vaishnavic ideals of *bhakti* from the debris that had been thrown over it by generations of unlettered and unspiritual Vaishnavas. The life and teachings of Shree Chaitanya were being presented by Brahmo writers in a new light. But even this revived interest in the movement of Shree Chaitanya created by the Brahmo Samaj was more or less narrow, theological and religious only. The Brahmo Samaj had not clearly brought out the message of social uplift and emancipation of Shree Chaitanya and Bengal Vaishnavism. Surendra Nath was practically the first to do so in this lecture at Bhowanipore. He presented Shree Chaitanya as the prophet of a new social freedom, and emphasised his revolt against the domination of the Brahmins and the caste system. This social message of Bengal Vaishnavism has been subsequently revived with greater force by the late Babu Sishir Kumar Ghose and the neo-Vaishnavic movement led by him and the late Babu Kedar Nath Datta Bhaktivinode. Early in the seventies of the last century educated Bengalees were practically ignorant of this social and humanitarian message of Shree Chaitanya's Vaishnavic movement in Bengal. And it was Surendra Nath who brought a knowledge of it to the generation to which I belong.

But the greatest and the most inspiring message of Surendra Nath's early propaganda was delivered through his lecture on Joseph Mazzini and the Young Italy movement organised by him. Mazzini's life and particularly his extremely sensitive patriotism which so worked upon his youthful imagination that even as a school boy he refused to join in any form of gaiety of his family and his community, in the face of the bondage in which his country

lay under Austrian domination, drew out all the latent passion for national freedom in us. The tyrannies of the Austrian army of occupation in Italy, who showed scant regard for the ordinary rights and liberties of the Italian people and treated even the Italian intellectuals of the middle class as members of an inferior race, indeed literally as helots and slaves, made a profound impression upon our sensitive minds. Neither the person nor the property of the Italian in the neighbourhood of the Austrian military camps, nor even the honour of their women, were safe from the wanton insults and outrages of Austrian officers and soldiers. We saw or imagined a great similitude between the position of the Italians under Austrian domination and our own position under British rule. In the outlying districts in cases between Europeans and Indians the latter could hope to receive practically no justice. The differential treatment accorded to Indians and Europeans even when they happened to be members of the same Covenanted Civil Service wrangled in our hearts. The plight of the indentured labourers in the tea gardens of Assam had already commenced to be agitated in our vernacular press. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* was circulating broadcast tales of magisterial high-handedness all over the province. All these things working upon our youthful imagination created a profound sympathy in us with the struggle for national freedom in Italy led by Mazzini when the story was presented to us by Surendra Nath. We commenced to read the writings of Mazzini and the history of the Young Italy movement. Here we saw also the earlier organisations for Italian freedom, particularly those of the Carbonari, with which Mazzini had himself been associated at the beginning of his patriotic career. The Carbonari were secret societies. They hoped to win their national freedom by covering the whole country with a network of secret revolutionary organisations, whose idea was to free their fatherland from the Austrian yoke by striking at the Austrian rulers. Secret assassinations were the main objective of these Carbonari organisations. Mazzini's intense moral consciousness gradually rebelled against these cowardly methods, and he soon broke away from his earlier Carbonari associates. Secret organisations, Mazzini discovered, paid a premium to moral

cowardice; and in his diagnosis of the national disease he found that lack of moral courage and the strength of character to boldly stand up for one's ideals regardless of whatever cost or consequences it might involve were the real roots of Italy's servitude and national degradation. The policy and methods of the Carbonari could not possibly find an effective remedy to this moral disease. Mazzini, therefore, left the Carbonari and boldly faced the persecutions of the Austrian Government. But though without any real revolutionary motive or any plan of secret assassinations as the way to national emancipation, the new inspiration imparted to Young Bengal by Surendra Nath's presentation of the life of Mazzini and the Italian freedom movement led many of us to form secret organisations. The Calcutta student community was at that time almost honeycombed with these organisations. Secrecy has a strange fascination for youthful minds. And this was the real psychology of our *penchant* for these secret societies. Surendra Nath was himself, I think, the president of quite a number of these secret societies, and I clearly remember how he used often times to cite the great popularity of a Russian politician (whose name I cannot call to mind) by the fact that he was the president of as many as more than half a hundred secret societies in Russia. These societies were not affiliated to one another. The members of one society did not know the members of the other society. Each society tried to religiously protect its own secrets from all outsiders, and yet this Russian patriot and politician was the head of so large a number of independent secret societies. Surendra Nath's connection with quite a number of the new secret societies among the youthful intellectuals of Calcutta proved similarly the unique confidence which he enjoyed of his young followers. Though without any serious plan or policy of political action aiming at the liberation of their people from the British yoke, these societies were, however, not lacking in seriousness. Their patriotism was serious, and how seriously they took it was seen in the vows and rituals of many of these societies. I knew of one such society, though I was not myself a member of it, whose initiatory rites were almost Masonic in some aspects. Every member of this society had to

sign the pledge of membership with his own blood drawn at the point of a sword from his breast. They were dreamers of wild dreams, but harmless dreamers so far, whose thought and imagination alone were of a revolutionary character, but who never seriously meant to rise in physical revolt against the British authority in the country, or who hoped to secure the emancipation of their people by a campaign of political assassinations.

Chapter 12

THE NEW STAGE AND NATIONAL SONGS



The Calcutta Students' Association, started by Ananda Mohan Bose and Surendra Nath Banerjee, was not, however, the only instrument that helped to call into being our new nationalism. The entire decade, 1870 to 1880, worked in various directions in our national life to produce this result. Not the least among the forces that worked towards it was the Bengali stage. With the revival of learning, following upon the introduction of English education, every department of our life found a rejuvenescence. A new literature was born, and along with it new dramas and a new stage came into being. We had, of course, Sanskrit dramas that challenged comparison with the best Greek dramas. But Sanskrit had ceased to be the spoken language of the people, if indeed it had ever been so. Even the Sanskrit dramas presented not Sanskrit but a dialect of it, called *Prakrit*, as the language of the people. It was the learned only and the aristocracy of literates who spoke in Sanskrit. Even their womenfolk did not speak in Sanskrit. They too conversed in Prakrit. The provincial dialects had therefore offered little or no room for keeping up the ancient traditions of the Sanskrit drama.

Before the birth of our new stage, the only form of dramatic literature that we had in Bengal was the *yatra*. The *yatras* were a combination of songs and conversations. They had no stage, no scenes, no make-ups, no properties such as constitute essential elements of the stage. These *yatras* in Bengal were mostly based upon the *Vaishnava* lyrics, depicting the love-sport of Shree Krishna and Shree Radha, which were sung as *keertans*. These

keertans were the special creation of the movement of Shree Chaitanya. The music of these *keertans* was very different from the orthodox Hindu music, though it was an adaptation of it. The chief object of our Vaishnava *keertans* was to free the new religious hymnology of the Chaitanya cult from the trammels of classical music which was not accessible to the mass mind and rarely imitable by the untrained ear of the man in the street. Though the leader was trained in all the intricacies of classical Hindu music, those who formed what may be called his chorus could generally follow him without any such special training. The Vaishnava *keertans* are an exquisite combination of drama and opera. They need no sceneries or properties because the hymns themselves contain perfect pictures of the natural settings and the ideal make-up of the actors in this sacred drama. Our *yatras* were really built upon these Vaishnavic lyrics. But these lyrics had been practically lost except among professional singers. The general population had no or very little knowledge of the lyrics of Vidyapati, Chandidas and the later Vaishnava poets who received their inspiration from the realisations of Shree Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and his associates. Early in the seventies of the last century the educated Bengalee first came into touch with these Vaishnava lyrics through a new edition of the ancient lyrics of Bengal or *Pracheen Kabya-Sangraha* edited by Akshay Chandra Sarkar and Sarada Charan Mitra. The most popular *yatras* of that period were, at least in Eastern Bengal, those of Krishna Kamal Goswami of Dacca. I have already mentioned these in a previous chapter. But we did not know then that Krishna Kamal Goswami's operas were practically adaptations of the ancient Vaishnavic *keertans*.

Our new dramas were, however, of a very different class. The Bengali stage was organised in the early seventies of the last century with the opening of two theatres in northern Calcutta—the Bengal Theatre and the National Theatre. In the earlier stages female parts were represented by males as in our *yatras*. Gradually, however, actresses were introduced. There was, of course, considerable opposition to this new development at first on moral grounds. This opposition came almost exclusively from

the Brahmo Samaj, which represented a powerful puritan movement in those days. But its numerous defects notwithstanding, the Bengali stage helped very materially to prepare the ground for Surendra Nath's political propaganda. In the early years of the seventies of the last century before Surendra Nath and Ananda Mohan had organised their new platform, it was the Bengali stage which had found expression to the new spirit of patriotism among our rising generation of educated intellectuals. It was this stage that first proclaimed the gospel of the religion of the motherland in an opera, now completely forgotten, called 'Bharata Mata' or 'Mother India'. I forget the details of the play, but the name indicates the nature of the theme and the religious idealisation which must have inspired it. Those were the days when a new passion for freedom, personal, social and political, had possessed the educated Bengalee mind. Our youthful intellectuals were not only anxious to acquire political freedom, but also equally, if not more, eager to break through every shackle that interfered with their freedom of thought and action. Social reform was even more popular than political reform. The desire for freedom is universally born of the sense of bondage. And in those early days consciousness of sacerdotal and social bondage was far more keen than the feeling of political bondage. The conflict between us and our foreign political masters had not as yet come out into the open. And therefore our earlier dramas were all social dramas written in support of widow remarriage and in condemnation of polygamy by the higher classes of Bengalee Hindus, particularly the Brahmins.

But political dramas were not long in coming. Already Hem Chandra Banerjee had voiced in his national lyrics the sense of impotence of his people to assert their legitimate rights and self-respect against their British masters. Gradually this political spirit became directly vocal, though it had long been expressed indirectly through the new Bengali poetry and fiction. 'Neela-Darpan' was the first political drama in Bengal. It presented the story of the indigo riots in Nadia and the unspeakable tyrannies on the peasants by the English indigo factors. It opened with a

rustic song which lamented the untimely death of Harish Chandra Mukherjee, Editor of the *Hindu Patriot*, who had courageously espoused the cause of the oppressed tenants, and the imprisonment of the Rev. Mr Long for publishing the story of these tyrannies in the press. And the refrain was: 'It is difficult for the peasant to live.' When it was put upon the board of the new Bengali theatres, the audience got wild with passion against the white planters; and sometimes they so far forgot themselves that they threw their shoes at the poor actor on the stage. The next political dramas were the two productions of the late Babu Upendra Nath Das, the eldest son of Babu Sri Nath Das, who was at that time one of the leaders at the Calcutta High Court Bar, 'Sarat-Sarojini' and 'Surendra-Binodinee'. In 1876 the then Prince of Wales, Albert Edward, came on a visit to India. In Calcutta Babu Jagadananda Mukherjee of the High Court Bar, who was at that time the Government Pleader, organised a 'purdah party' to welcome the royal visitor. It convulsed Hindu society to its very foundations. The *purdah* was still an almost religious institution. Hindu women of the upper classes never appeared before strangers, not even when they were male friends of their own families, unless they were closely related to them either by blood or by marriage. To bring these ladies to meet the Prince of Wales was incredible. Nobody believed that the ladies who met the Prince of Wales could have been drawn from the Hindu aristocracy of Calcutta. Hindu society rose up in arms against what they believed to be an outrage on the sanctity of their home. The incident found material for a farce which was put on the stage of the Bengal Theatre. The government of the day, already irritated by what it believed to be the excesses of the Bengali press, could not tolerate this open libel against the royal visitor, and an ordinance was immediately issued against the authorities of the theatre prohibiting a repetition of its performance, and generally establishing police censorship over our new stage.

From the birth of our new literature, inspired by the ideal which we had imbibed from our new education and contact with European thought and culture, particularly that which was the

creation itself of the French Revolution, Bengali poetry and drama had been finding expression to our new love of freedom, though these expressions were somewhat veiled by fanciful allusions to the conflicts of the Hindu with their erstwhile Moslem political masters. Some referred to Rajput history depicting their conflict with the Mogul invaders. The poems of Rangalal Mukherjee, his story of Padmini, were admittedly based upon the history of the sack of Chitore by Alauddin. There were others, however, which were pure fancy pictures presenting the spoliation of the country by alien rulers.

Towards the beginning of the last quarter of the last century or more accurately in the sixth and seventh decades of it, a number of 'national songs' had given expression to our new love of country. The most popular of them all was:

*kata kala pare bala bharata re
dukha sagara santare par habe?
abasada hime dubiye dubiye
ayi ki sesha nibesha rasatala re?
para hate diye dhana ratna shukhe.
baha louha-binirmita hara buke,
para dipmala nagare nagare
lumi je timire, tumi se timire.*

Freely rendered into English it said:

How long will it take, thee, Oh Bharata,
to swim across this ocean of misery?
Or, sinking and sinking in depression,
wilt thou enter the nether regions
for ever?
Having gladly offered thy jewels to the
stranger, thou carriest now only an
iron chain on thy breast.
There are rows of light in thy cities
(owned by the stranger)
But thou art in darkness all the same.

Babu Govinda Chandra Roy, who was a Bengalee resident of Agra, was the author. Another song of his was addressed to the river Yamuna:

*nirmala salile bahiche sada
tatasalini sundari jamune ayi
juga juga bahi probaha tomari
dekhila kata sata ghatana ayi*

Thou, Oh Yamuna, art ever flowing in
pure currents between thy banks,
Thou ever beautiful stream!
From age to age thy currents have seen
hundreds and hundreds of events.

And starting with this refrain the poet recounts in exquisite pathetic of touches the ancient glories of India and the rise and fall of ancient kingdoms and empires.

In another national song the author bursts forth in tears crying:

*malina mukha chandrama bharata tomari
ratri diba jhariche lochana bari.*

O India, gloomy is thy face, beautiful
that was as the moon;
Day and night tears flow from thy eyes.

This was from the opera 'Bharat-Mata'.

Another national song was an almost open condemnation of foreign economic exploitation. The burthen of it was that India was becoming poorer everyday owing to the loss of her national freedom. It was from a novel by Babu Manomohan Bose, *Bangadheep-Parajaya*, depicting the conquest of Bengal by a foreign people who came from a high island on the sea called Tungadweep. "The weaver and the blacksmith are crying day and night. They cannot find their food by plying their trade. Even threads and needles come from distant shores; and match-sticks are not produced in the country. Whether in dressing themselves

or producing their domestic utensils or even in lighting their oil-lamps, in nothing are the people independent of their foreign masters... . Swarms of locusts from a distant island coming to these shores have eaten up all its solid grains leaving only the chaff for the starving children of the soil." The reference to the economic exploitation of the country by our present British masters was practically open in this song.

Hem Chandra Banerjee's *Bharat-Sangeet* or the 'Song of India' opened with the words:

*bajre singa baj ayi rabe
sabai swadhin a bipul bhabe
sabai jagrata gyaner gourabe
bharat shudhui ghumai rai.*

Sing, O my clarionet! Sing to these words:
Every one is free in this wide, wide world,
Everyone is awake in the glory of science,
India alone lieth asleep !

And the poet continuing in this strain says:

*chin brahmadesh asavya japan
tarao swadhin tarao pradhan
bharat shudhui ghumai rai*

China and Burma and barbarous Japan,
Even they are independent, they are superior,
India alone knoweth no waking!

Another national song sounded a heart-rending note :

*jata din tor kalankita pramanurashi,
shindu jale na jaibe bhasi,*

O India, weep, weep thou,
As long as thy polluted atoms have not
been washed away into the waters
of the ocean,
So long weep thou, so long weep!"

These were some of our earlier national songs. They were the first outpourings of the new inspiration of freedom that had come to our people with their contact with modern European thought and culture through their English education. When Surendra Nath and Ananda Mohan returned from England in 1875-76, their political propaganda found the ground ready, owing to the new renaissance in Bengalee literature, the Bengalee stage and the birth of the new hymnology of our patriotism. These new national songs were very popular at that time among the youthful intellectuals of our people. And they contributed as much as the *Bangadarshan* and the new Bengalee stage to the birth and early development of our new nationalism.

Chapter 13

NABAGOPAL MITRA AND THE HINDU MELA



The story of the early years of the new nationalism in Bengal would be incomplete without a full and grateful notice of the contribution of the late Babu Nabagopal Mitra and the Hindu Mela started by him early in the seventies of the last century to it. Babu Nabagopal was a prominent member of the Adi Brahmo Samaj. It was here evidently that he came into somewhat close contact with the family of Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore and Babu Rajnarain Bose. We find Babu Nabagopal taking a prominent part on the side of Maharshi Devendra Nath and the conservative section of his Brahmo Samaj congregation in their controversy with young Keshub Chunder and his associates representing the progressive elements in the Samaj. Babu Rajnarain Bose was also a prominent and powerful protagonist on the side of Devendra Nath. Rajnarain was personally a progressive Brahmo. He did not believe in current Hindu orthodoxy, particularly in regard to its irksome restraint on personal freedom in the matter of eating and drinking. But he was a born lover of his own country, and his love of country was organised in the very make and constitution of his mind and morals through his deep and deathless devotion to the ideals of Indian and more particularly Hindu culture.

When Keshub and his progressive Brahmos developed unmistakable tendencies towards the modern European or Christian ethics and rationalism, Rajnarain, who had drunk deep of the new knowledge or illumination brought to us by our British masters, stood up boldly to proclaim the superiority of Hindu

religion and culture over European and Christian theology and civilisation. His lecture in Bengali on *Hindu Dharmer Shresthatta* or the 'Superiority of Hinduism' was really the first challenge of the ancient spirit of India to the aggressive thought and civilisation of Europe.

English education had been more or less destroying the faith of the educated intelligentsia in the religion of their fathers. It was the challenge of 19th century European rationalism to the inherited beliefs of our people. This rationalism, while repudiating Christian orthodoxy, was yet the child of European and Christian thought and culture. It captured the mind and imagination of our newly educated intelligentsia essentially for European and Christian ideals, even though these were divested completely of the unreason and superstition of popular Christianity. The Hindus had forgotten their own history and culture. They had lost recollection of how in their own culture and history there had been similar movements of reason and similar protests in the name of personal freedom. The first protest of reason in Hinduism or the Vedic religion was raised in the early *Upanishads* which proclaimed the Unity of Godhead as against the multiplicity of the Vedic gods and goddesses. These *Upanishads* protested against the sacrifices and rituals of the early *Vedas*; they worked on a synthesis between nature-worship and ancestor-worship, the two lines of early Vedic evolution, in first, the conception of Brahman, recognised as the unity of all the nature-deities, and second, of Prajapati representing the head and source of ancestor worship. Brahman and Prajapati represented the ultimate synthesis of the two parallel lines of Vedic religion called the *devayana* and the *pitriyana* or the way of the gods and the way of the fathers or manes. This duality was also subsequently cancelled by the realisation of the Ultimate Reality or the First Cause as Brahman from whom all objects coming into being continue to be, towards whom all objects move through processes of cosmic evolution, and into whom all objects enter at the final dissolution. This was the final revelation of the thought and theology of the *Upanishads*. Here we find a rational basis of the most advanced and complete form of monism or monotheism as

yet realised by man. Here in the teachings of the *Upanishads* we find a real formula of the worship of the Lord who is Spirit in spirit and in truth as has been inculcated by Jesus Christ himself in the New Testament.

And Rajnarain Bose took up this philosophical monism of the *Upanishads* which represented not merely the highest generalisation of Hindu speculation but also the deepest and the most direct realisation of the Infinite by Hindu religious and spiritual culture. Not only have we the most perfect system of theism or monotheism in our ancient theology and religion, but side by side with these religious and spiritual ideals Hinduism presented also a much higher social idealism, all its outer distinctions of caste notwithstanding, than has as yet been reached by Christendom. This was briefly and in the main the substance of Rajnarain Bose's essay on the 'Superiority of Hinduism'. It was really the first public protest of the age-long Nation-Spirit of India against the threatened domination of our thought and life by the aggressive and colour-proud civilisation of Europe. It was enough that the British had secured the control of our government and administration. They could not be allowed to be the masters of our mind and manners, of our social, religious and spiritual life. The spirit of this new nationalism came out particularly into the open early in the seventies of the last century when Keshub Chunder Sen prayed for a new marriage law from the foreign political authority in the country, to legalise inter-caste marriages and other marriages performed without the presence of the *Salgram* as witness, and over which no Brahmin presided. This was opposed not only by representatives of orthodox Hindu opinion on the ground that it would encourage and bring about the gradual disruption of the old Hindu society but also by the members of the Adi Brahmo Samaj who had already been celebrating marriages without observing any idolatrous ceremony or introducing the sacred symbol of *Salgram* as a witness to the marriage-bond, on the ground that by seeking this new law the Brahmos were by implication proclaiming the illegality of the previous Brahmo marriages. In the controversy over Keshub's

Brahmo Marriage Bill Babu Nabagopal Mitra took a prominent part in opposing it.

Babu Nabagopal's as well as Rajnarain Bose's nationalism was inspired, however, by a much wider outlook than that of mere theology or religion or social conservatism. Rajnarain Bose could indeed hardly be called a conservative, or if he was a conservative at all, his conservatism was not due to any unreasonable attachment to current customs and institutions of Hindu society, but predominantly, if indeed not exclusively, it was due to his intense opposition to the imitation of European ideals and institutions by his countrymen. His conservatism was, in fact, inspired far more by political than by social motives. As under the Moslem domination Hindu society developed a most dogmatic conservatism with a view to prevent being overwhelmed by the aggressive culture of Islam, so Rajnarain Bose and others were opposed to the more radical social reformers of their time because they were afraid that unless this imitative social reform movement was checked very definitely, it would strengthen the hold of the alien political authority established in the country by adding to it the moral and spiritual hold which the introduction of European customs and institutions in our society would inevitably bring about. Rajnarain Bose, though one of the most prominent products of the new English education in the country, was among the very first to initiate a movement for the preservation and purification of our national vernacular and in his loyalty to it he organised a small association of his educated contemporaries who pledged themselves never to use the medium of the English language in their personal conversation and correspondence with their own people. He was the first to use the medium of Bengali in his public addresses to his own people, at a time when English lectures were almost universally in vogue. Rajnarain was also among the very first to encourage the use of indigenous clothes and other articles to the exclusion of foreign products. He was moved by a complete ideal of national freedom, which would be realised in every department of the nation's life, religious and social no less than economic, industrial and political. Nabagopal must have imbibed his own nationalism to a very large extent

from Rajnarain Bose, and the Hindu Mela which he organised early in the seventies of the last century was really the joint child of these two early representatives of modern Indian nationalism.

Babu Nabagopal was known among his contemporaries as 'National' Mitra. He was the editor and proprietor also, I believe, of an English weekly, called the *National Paper*. It was written in almost schoolboy English. Nabagopal Babu was proud even of his ungrammatical and unidiomatic English. 'English,' he would say, 'is not my mother tongue, and though I may use the vehicle of this foreign language under practical compulsion, I feel no call to waste my time and energy in trying to master the senseless idioms of it.' His hobby, however, was the development of the physique of the rising generation of his countrymen. Sir George Campbell, Lieut. Governor of Bengal in the sixties of the last century, had introduced physical culture as part of school training in Bengal. Gymnastic classes were opened in the government schools all over the province in pursuance of the new education policy of the government. Babu Nabagopal Mitra threw himself enthusiastically into this physical training of our boys. He had a physical training or gymnastic school run by himself at 1, Sankar Ghosh's Lane, which a fairly large number of university youngmen, particularly those coming from the *mufassil* districts, regularly attended. Here we had not only the full paraphernalia of gymnastic exercises of the British schools, horizontal, parallel bars, etc., but Nabagopal Babu added to these our national exercises of wrestling, *lathi*, dagger and sword-play. These premises were not suited to rifle practice, but that was also in Nabagopal Babu's programme. That was before the passing of Lord Lytton's Arms Act. The younger members of Maharishi Devendra Nath's family, particularly Babu Jyotirindra Nath Tagore, were very much interested in the movement of Nabagopal Babu, and it received, I think, substantial financial support from them. Nabagopal Babu's family residence was in Cornwallis Street at the junction of that street with Sankar Ghosh's Lane. When I first made his acquaintance he was living as an independent gentleman, devoting not only his time and energy but also practically the whole of his financial resources to the

promotion of the cause of physical education of his people and the revival of national arts and industries. He seems to have come very soon to the end of his personal resources and was compelled to take service in the Calcutta Corporation as licence Officer. But he continued to run his hobby and finally organised the first Bengalee circus in which he lost his all, and passed away in the eighties of the last century almost a penniless man.

In 1876 I joined his gymnastic class at I, Sankar Ghosh's Lane. Early in the spring of this year, the Hindu Mela was held in the garden house of Raja Badan Chand at Tala. I cannot say if that garden house stands still. It was here at this *mela* that I first came into conflict with Anglo-Indian arrogance and police aggression. There was a row over a small incident with which I was directly concerned. I was sitting on a chair, waiting for some gymnastic performances which were advertised to be demonstrated at the *mela*. A European or Eurasian came from behind, and tried to shove me off my chair, as he wanted it, I subsequently heard, for a lady companion of his. If he had politely asked me to accommodate his lady friend, I would without the least hesitation have given my chair to her. Instead of this he came and rudely asked me to get up and let him ~~have~~ the chair. I naturally refused and then he tried to force me ~~out~~ of it. That was the origin of the row. The youthful students among the assembled crowd soon came up and fell into the fray. The police immediately followed and took sides with the European or Eurasian who had started the quarrel. A general melee between the students and the police followed. Police reinforcements were immediately called up from the Cossipore Thana. The students, however, took their stand upon a heap of brickbats lying in the garden and from there for a considerable time kept the police at bay. Surendra Nath's younger brother, Jitendra Nath, now Captain Banerjee, played a very prominent part in this drama. He was a famous athlete of our time, and rendered an excellent account of himself in this fight. Struck, however, by one of the police brickbats, he saw blood running from his head. Finding that with this blood on his clothes it would be impossible for him to escape arrest, he jumped over the wall of the garden and laying a policeman who

went to catch him flat on the ground by a kick, he walked home quietly via Dum Dum. And when some friends of mine went to Mr Surendra Nath Banerjee at about dusk or after an interval of about a couple of hours, to inform him of my arrest and that of some other friends, they found young Jitendra Nath, who was, I think, reading in the second year class at that time, pouring over, of all books, Taylor's *Ancient History*, and asking them what was all this row about.

The whole thing ended in a police case. I was one of the accused. The charge was rioting and obstructing a public servant in the discharge of his duties. Both these charges were as false as false could be. None of us created the riot, and we did not obstruct any public servant in the discharge of his duties. Considering, however, the seriousness of the charge, my father was informed by wire about it, and asked to send sufficient funds to arrange for my defence. My father was very much put out by the information. He could not imagine that unless I had gone absolutely to evil ways there could be any clash between myself and the police, and so he refused to help me. But my father's friends in Sylhet sent the required amount, Rs. 800, counsel's fee for my defence, to the late Babu Jai Govinda Shome, the well-known leader of the Indian Christian community in Calcutta, who came from my own native district of Sylhet and had for a time, after taking his law degree, practised in the District Judge's Court at Sylhet. The case was tried by the Police Magistrate of Sealdah, Raja Harendra Krishna Bahadur, who convicted me and sentenced me to pay a fine of Rs. 20. Mr Piffard, my counsel, after the court had delivered its verdict and sentence, came up to me and said, "Well, young man, you need not be ashamed of this conviction. No other court would convict you. You acted as a gentleman." At the end of the trial, Mr Shome sent the whole record of the case to my father, who had it translated, and after going through it he is reported to have said that I acted as a gentleman, which was expected of a son of his, and he would spend ten times the amount that had been sent for my defence to defend such gentlemanly conduct, should the call come to him again in the future. Though there was loss of some money, it involved no

dishonour, and in his values of things honour stood immeasurably higher than money.

This was before I came in contact with Pandit Shivanath. And the inspiration of Surendra Nath's new patriotic and political propaganda on the one side, and Nabagopal's national propaganda on the other, both contributed very materially to the motives and the ideals that drew me to Shivanath and moved me to throw myself unreservedly into the larger idealism of the Brahmo Samaj.

Chapter 14

POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGES DURING MY COLLEGE DAYS



During my college life in Calcutta (1875-79) the country was passing through great political changes that had a lasting effect upon our social and political evolution. During the closing years of my school days Lord Mayo was the Indian Viceroy. His brief Viceroyalty was noted for the deportation of the Wahabi leader Amir Khan. The British Government in those days, specially in Northern India, stood more or less in fear of a possible Mahomedan awakening. The Hindus had taken more kindly to the new education introduced by their British masters. This education, as those who helped to introduce it expected, won the intellectual and moral allegiance of the new educated classes of their subjects to the British power in the country. But the Mahomedans stood out of this education. The upper classes of the Mahomedans still nursed the natural sense of wrong against those who had wrested the hegemony of India from their hands. The Wahabis were a sect of Mahomedans who had started a powerful propaganda, religious on the face of it, but not without political possibilities. It had its centre in Patna. The government, however, did not accept the Wahabi movement on its face value as a purely religious movement but scented deep political motives behind it. Those were the days when the Mahomedans were suspect in the eye of our British masters. The leader of the Wahabis, Amir Khan, was arrested, and detained under Regulation III of 1818. An application was made for a writ of *habeas corpus*

to the Calcutta High Court which was heard by Chief Justice Norman. That application was rejected. Mr Annesty of the Bombay High Court Bar was engaged on behalf of Amir Khan. Mr Annesty's speech in which he hauled Lord Mayo over the coals for what was described as his tyranny over the helpless subjects of Her Majesty in India was published in pamphlet forms along with the proceedings of this case. These pamphlets were for many years something like the scripture of our new patriotism. Chief Justice Norman was stabbed and killed on the steps of the Calcutta High Court by a Mahomedan believed to have been a member of the Wahabi sect. Caught red-handed he was justly sentenced to death. So great, however, was the indignation caused by this assassination among the ruling race, including members of the government, that the man was refused a Moslem burial and was burnt like the Hindus. The assassination of Justice Norman was followed by that of Lord Mayo in the Andamans by a prisoner named Sher Ali. The two assassinations were believed to be the reprisals of the adherents of the Wahabi leader for his life imprisonment. The Wahabi, trial however, helped to strengthen our infant patriotic sentiment by a new sense of wrong against our British masters.

Lord Mayo was succeeded by Lord Northbrook. Lord Northbrook's administration made itself responsible for the trial and deposition of the Gaikwad of Baroda on a charge of complicity with the attempted murder of the British Resident, Col. Fayre. This was the first time when the Chief of an Indian State was tried by a court appointed by the British power and was deprived of his royal status and privileges in violation of what were believed to be his treaty rights. It created considerable nervousness among the princes and chiefs of the Indian states. But they were without much education, and the country had not as yet an organised and powerful public press to give effective expression to the widespread discontent caused by the trial of the Gaikwad. It was the Bengali press only, led by the *Hindoo Patriot*, which was at that time in charge of Babu Kristodas Pal, that found courage to voice this simmering discontent. Of our vernacular newspapers the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* was the most

outspoken in its criticisms of public policy, while the *Somprokash* was the prototype of the *Hindoo Patriot*, and though it did not lack courage, its tone was more sober than that of the *Patrika*, and both these frankly condemned the action of the government in this matter.

Lord Mayo's brief viceroyalty, marked by the Wahabi trial, and Lord Northbrook's by the trial and deposition of the Gaikwad, gave birth to a new political consciousness among the rising intelligentsia of the country. In Bengal this consciousness was perhaps the strongest. This consciousness, particularly the anti-British feeling of it, possessed the rising generation of Bengalee students, which was fed by our new Bengali literature and the new Bengalee press, particularly the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and the new Bengalee stage. Lord Lytton's viceroyalty brought fresh fuel to this new patriotic passion among us by bringing home to the Indian subjects of Her Majesty the impossibility of realising their dreams of a new and free India under British rule, and with the help of their present political masters.

Educated India had thought that with Dalhousie's administration, which was very largely responsible for the Sepoy Mutiny, the era of annexations in India had definitely closed, and when the government was taken over from the East India Company by the Crown, India had entered upon a new course of peace and progress that would lead finally to a free constitution like that of the British themselves in their own country. That hope received a rude shock under the viceroyalty of Lord Lytton. Lord Lytton came as the nominee of the Conservative Government in England under Lord Beaconsfield. India's foreign policy was at that time dominated by fear of Russia's advance in Central Asia and towards the Persian and Afghanistan borders. Russia was then Britain's rival. The Crimean War had been provoked by the suspicion of the British of their European rival. Turkey was the objective of Russia's advance in Europe even as India was believed to have been final objective in her advance in Central Asia. Russia was territorially the largest kingdom in Europe. She had enormous natural resources. Her dream from the days of Peter the Great had been to build up a navy that would rival the British navy. But

she had no seaport and unless she could have free access to the Mediterranean, her dreams would remain eternally unrealised. She wanted therefore to push her way through the Black Sea and the Bosphorous into the Mediterranean. Turkey stood in the way, and the Russo-Turkish wars owed their origin to this Russian policy. Great Britain was naturally opposed to this expansion of Russia. And she found in Turkey a helpful instrument in her opposition to Russian ambitions. This was the psychology of the Crimean War. That was also the psychology of the next Russo-Turkish war, wherein the British sided, not openly though, with the Ottoman. When Russia practically won that war, the European Powers combined to deprive her of the fruits of that victory. By the Peace of Berlin (1878) Russia's European ambition was practically strangled. The credit of it was shared by two European statesmen, the British Premier, Lord Beaconsfield and the Prussian Chancellor, Prince Bismarck. After the Treaty of Berlin, Russia quite naturally turned to Asia in the hope of satisfying her ancient ambition of building up a world empire that would enter the lists with the British Empire. She commenced to spread her hegemony into Central and Eastern Asia. Central Asia rapidly came under Russian domination. From Central Asia Russia put forward her foot towards Persia and Afghanistan. Herat became the strategic objective of this new Russian expansion. Herat was believed to be the key to both Persia and Afghanistan. If Russia could get a firm footing in Herat, both Persia and Afghanistan would lie at her feet. And then Great Britain's Empire in India would have to face this new menace. This was how our North-Western Frontier policy was born.

It was admittedly not a safe frontier. Afghanistan offered the first difficulty. Between Afghanistan and the settled districts of British India there lay an extensive territory inhabited by undependable tribes who could neither be completely subdued and converted into peaceful and loyal citizens of the British Empire nor be trusted to act as faithful allies in the event of a foreign invasion. The same was true also of Afghanistan. The whole of the north-western frontier of India was thus a great danger point to British India. These considerations led Lord Beaconsfield to

search for what he called a “scientific frontier” for British India towards the north-west. Lord Lytton was appointed to the Indian viceroyalty to carry out this mission. In search of this ‘scientific frontier’ the Indian Viceroy provoked a new Afghan war. Educated public opinion in India was against this costly quest of Lord Beaconsfield’s mare’s nest. It did not favour this aggressive war on the Afghans. It hurt, in the first place, their new-born love of freedom. That was by no means a narrow national sentiment. The Indian intelligentsia wanted freedom not only for themselves but for every other country in the world. Another reason of their opposition was the inevitable financial waste which this military enterprise would involve, increasing thereby the burden of Indian taxation. This last fear did not take long to be realised. Simultaneously with the progress of Lord Lytton’s Kabul War two things happened in the fiscal history of British India. One was the misappropriation, as our people took it, of the Famine Fund by the drain of this war; the second was the imposition of a new tax to meet its expenses. The Kabul War roused considerable opposition among the intellectuals in India. It brought forth very bitter criticism of the policy of the government. This criticism was most outspoken in the vernacular press, particularly of Bengal. Lord Lytton was moved to pass a new Press Act with a view to crush the freedom of the vernacular press.

Though Lord Lytton’s Vernacular Press Act applied to all India, the real cause of offence came from the Bengalee press. The *Sadharanee*, edited by Babu Akshay Chandra Sarker and published from Chinsurah, was at this time the most powerful organ of educated public opinion in Bengal. I still remember a remarkable article on Lord Lytton’s speech at the Delhi Durbar of January 1877 headed *Bhik nehi mangtehe ham, ehi dushman bolai le*, meaning ‘Call back this malicious brute, I do not want any alms’. It was a reply to the grant of honours and titles and promise of concessions to the people of India on the occasion of the assumption of the title of Queen Empress by Her Majesty Queen Victoria. The awakened political consciousness of educated India did not appreciate this new title of the British sovereign. She was the Queen of England, a constitutional

monarch but as the head of the Indian administration she was henceforth to be designated as the Empress of India—not a constitutional monarch but something like an ‘oriental’ despot. The fertile brain of Benjamin Disraeli (Lord Beaconsfield) had invented this new title in the hope that the intimate relation, which this title sought to suggest between Her Majesty and her Indian subjects, would strengthen the foundation of India’s loyalty to the British Crown. But the Indian intellectuals did not appreciate this idea. This new title practically repudiated their claim to rights of equal citizenship with Her Majesty’s British subjects. It was an open reversal of the fundamental principles and ideals of the Proclamation of 1858. The spirit of the Disraeli-Lytton policy provoked this remarkable reply from the *Sadharanee*.

The papers submitted to the legislature in justification of the proposed press legislation contained mostly translations from the Bengalee press; and of these the *Sadharanee* came in for the largest notice. The first extract was from a violently Turkophile article extending over four and a quarter columns of the paper, discussing the fall of Plevna during the Russo-Turkish war. The Plevna touched our new patriotism, which had a universal outlook. The *Sadharanee* said that it had been deeply moved by the fall of Plevna because we Hindus have borne and still bear the hardships and misery which follow the downfall of the prestige of a nation. In every bone, vein and pore of our bodies this sense of national degradation works as a slow consuming fire. God forbid that even our deadliest enemies should suffer as we do.” The next extract from the *Sadharanee* was from a fairly long article headed (in its English rendering) ‘Spurious Loyalty’, and ran as follows:

The study of the very alphabet of politics has taught us this, that the performance of pledges forms no part of politics. When the Russian Emperor, setting aside an old treaty, resolved to station men of war in the waters of the Black Sea, Mr. Mill was asked by the English Minister (of the day) to express his views on the subject. Mr Mill then frankly declared that there was no connection between ‘politics and

the performance of pledges'. Today, finding myself in a dangerous position, I agree to pay you a tribute of a million sterling. But ten years hence, becoming conscious of my own strength, I find that if I do not pay you the promised million, you will be powerless to enforce your demands. I accordingly break my promise.

If you and I were to do anything of this kind, it would be considered a grievous crime. But kings frequently act in this way. The science of politics is in no way concerned with morality or immorality.

The British Government is continually breaking its promises. Thus it first engaged to pay an annual sum of 53 lakhs to the Nawab Nazim of Moorsidabad. This was reduced to 32 lakhs after some time, which again has been ultimately cut down to half this sum. The Fortress of Gwalior, belonging to the Scindia, and the Berar to the Nizam, once taken as securities, have not been restored. These are common occurrences. A history of the non-fulfilment of promises by the British Government would be the whole history of the last hundred and fifty years. We are not so foolish as to believe that the British Government should now, after a period of profound peace for over eighteen years, redeem the promises which they made on the 1st of November, 1858, soon after the crisis of the Indian Mutiny. During that critical period there were dark clouds in the political sky; bright flashed the lightnings afar and European hearts were chilled with an icy fear. But now the gentle breeze of peace is blowing, the sun of prosperity shines on high. Where is the wonder then that the English should now throw aside the heavy clothes with which they protected their bodies against cold, wind and rain? Who ever uses winter clothes in spring?

It is the general belief that the Viceroy's speech on the 1st of January 1877, nullified to a considerable extent the Queen's Proclamation of 1858. Babu Surendra Nath Banerjee, because he gave expression to this belief at a meeting of the Calcutta Municipality, brought down upon himself the wrath of the *Sahibs* (Europeans), who charged

him with being disloyal. He who attempted to mar the spirit of the Queen's Proclamation by a cloud of vague phrases is regarded as a loyal politician, but if you understand the thing and venture to speak out plainly, you are looked upon as disloyal. Do the *Sahibs* take us for such idiots as to think that we can be hushed to silence, because they bring against us some bitter and unfounded accusations?

We know very well when it behoves us to show our loyalty; we tore our bosoms and poured out our heart's blood to welcome the two Royal Princes who visited India. But what definition of loyalty are we to accept when we are frankly criticising the measures of Government? The Viceroy spoke against the Queen's Proclamation and shall we say, 'No, the Viceroy said nothing against it'. Such insincere flattery is not loyalty.

The Proclamation of 1858 declared that 'Our subjects, of whatever race or creed, shall so far as practicable, be admitted to all offices under our Government the duties of which they may be fitted to perform, by their ability, education and integrity.

Now, Her Majesty's Representative has declared that in the present state of the Empire, and for its permanent welfare, all political and high executive duties should be entrusted to Europeans only.

It was declared in 1858 that if the natives of this country proved themselves equal, all appointments, so far as practicable, would be given to them. But now we are told that all high executive offices are to be given to Englishmen only. If these two declarations are not contradictory, then henceforth there will be no difference in colour between black and white. If it amounts to disloyalty to point out this contradiction, and if for this, the Government chooses to punish us, then we with tens of millions of Her Majesty's subjects, are prepared to be punished along with Surendra Nath.

The third extract from the *Sadharanee* was from an article headed 'The Final Decision in the Fenuah Cases'.

It neither bespeaks a cultivated taste, nor is it agreeable to have constantly to write against Government. But in view of the arbitrary acts which have become common in these days, we should be wanting in our duty if we passed them over without any protest. The people were hitherto proud of the justice administered in the High Court. In seeking to shield a rash, oppressive and unprincipled European Civilian, Government has now brought that Court into contempt, and struck a blow at the root of British justice. Government has thus worked its own ruin and yet, if after this, the people are found to express discontent, the Anglo-Indian editors will brand the Bengalees with such epithets as ungrateful, disloyal, scurrilous, and what not.

Long ago we wrote about the Fenuah case. Our readers may remember that the *Sahibs* of the factory wanted to have an embankment opened by force. The ryots resisted and they stretched themselves upon the *bund*. In order to frighten them, the *Sahibs* fired blank cartridges, but this proving of no effect, bullets were regularly used. In the Court the ryots deposed that they saw a gun in the hand of the *Burra Sahib*. The *Burra Sahib*, however, in his deposition said that he had no gun with him, but the *Chota Sahib* had one. A great confusion ensued. Those who said that the *Burra Sahib* had a gun with him were charged with perjury. At first the case was heard by Mr Badcock, then it was transferred to the Court of Mr Sarson. After the deposition of seven witnesses had been taken the case was again transferred to the Court of Mr Vassey. It was not found necessary to transfer it again in as much as Mr Vassey sentenced the helpless ryots to six months' imprisonment. All this was the work of the well-known Mr Kirkwood. An appeal was preferred in the High Court against these partial and illegal proceedings. In the appeal the Government, whatever object it might have had in view, took up the cause of one party.

The Counsel for the Government made too much of this matter. After this, the Government Counsel, with the sanction

of the High Court appeared in the case not because he had any legal right to do so, but because he was actuated by self-interest, and he frankly declared that his principal object was to exonerate a Government officer from unfounded accusations. However, for many days the discussion went on regarding the legality of Mr. Kirkwood's proceedings. At last the High Court decided that it was of no use to discuss this question. They took it for granted that the proceedings had been all along quite legal, that there was no legal objection against the judgment of the lower Court. The Judges of the High Court took all this for granted, and found the helpless ryots to be guilty of the charge, but they were of opinion that the punishment they had already undergone was sufficient, for the Counsel for the Government had expressed an opinion, that he had no objection to such a finding.

As to the final judgment of the High Court in the case, it is observed that perhaps a decision so strange was never passed in even the most barbarous country in the world. It is first taken for granted that there has been no illegality in the proceedings, and then punishment is inflicted on a number of innocent persons on this supposition. There is not a doubt that the fame of British justice is gone for ever.

But it will not do for us to remain unconcerned any longer. There is no justice in the country. Now for some time we must create an agitation in England. We hope Associations of Calcutta will join and create an agitation on this subject in the Parliament of Great Britain and Ireland.

The *Bharat-Mihir*, edited by the late Babu Anath Bandhu Guha and published from Mymensingh, was another powerful organ of educated Bengalee opinion that commanded universal respect. In an article published on the 20th of September, 1877, under the heading 'Our Grief' it wrote:

The *Samaj Darpana* has taken leave for good. It was published for the last time on the 23rd Bhadra. It will not to be published any more. We make a few extracts below from

what the Editor said when he bade farewell to his readers: 'If to teach loyalty to the public be the object of the Native newspapers then they may as well not exist at all, for people are already sufficiently loyal.'

We cannot say how far with a pure heart Mr Eden or the *Englishman* demand loyalty from us. We know only this much that the English had been exceedingly beneficial to us. Never did there exist (in the country) under any other Government such justice, such education, such tranquility. Nay, even in the times of the Hindu monarchs, there was not such justice, such education, such tranquility throughout the country. But then we know this also that although the country is sufficiently educated, its tranquility is complete, yet its administration of justice is not perfect. We have many benefits yet to obtain from the English. We have said so plainly, and have advised the natives of the country to agitate about this subject. It is for giving such advice that Mr Eden and the English editors call us slanderers or enemies of the Government and threaten to gag our mouths.

If anybody says there is not the slightest dissatisfaction in the country, not a single man's face is sad, all are satisfied, all are happy, there is nothing to be said against the past acts of the Government, nothing against the present acts, then it will be our duty to reprobate such a man as liar, as one who has not given a faithful representation of the actual state of things. And such a man is no friend of the English. What is the use of newspapers if they observe a certain state of feelings in the community and represent quite a different state of feelings before the Government or the public at large? Would it not be a misnomer to call newspapers, the organs of the public, if the journalist could not represent the grievances of the people in a free and unfettered manner? Is it necessary to repeat *ad nauseam* that the English are our benefactors? How often shall we abuse loyalty by fabricating on every occasion when we discuss (public questions) that we are loyal? Let Mr Eden reform his own house before taking upon himself to reprove us. What heart

will not be pained to see the spectacle of educated natives crying for want of food, while every month batches of Englishmen, fresh from England, are taking possession of all the appointments in the public service? Or what political economy is this that would sanction the retention in the service of highly paid Europeans, while famine and destitution raged in the land and people groaned under the burden of taxation? Why should Mowla Bux be hanged for an offence for which a Heeman receives only 18 months' imprisonment? Why should Surendra Nath be dismissed for a fault for which a Jack or a John receives promotion? That you should despise me as a worthless thing not to be touched while I should worship you with flowers and sandal wood is a thing which nature never heard before. We are no boors though we may be worthless in many respects. We can well appreciate the benefits we have received from Englishmen. Perhaps no conqueror race have ever been so generous to a conquered people as have the English rulers been to the people of this country. But is that a reason why we should hold that they are impartial; that what they promise they always fulfil? Are we not to lay our representations before the public when the interests of justice are interfered with? We give publicity to all this, in the hope that Government, on being informed of our grievances, will redress them. If it were not that we are a subject race, such expression of our grievances would never have been considered as amounting to disloyalty. Having worshipped so long in the depths of our hearts the virtuous Victoria, we are at last told that we are disloyal. Mr Eden has not done a meritorious act by causing pain to the hearts of so many and by reproving a whole country.'

'We are sorry that the *Samaj Darpana* has ceased to exist, because of the threat of Mr. Eden or of the *Englishman* newspaper. We are sorry also because we loved the *Samaj Darpana*. When some one stops our utterance by force, then we may cease to exist under compulsion, though it may be with reluctance. But why should we abandon our sphere of action beforehand? We did not undertake the task

of vernacular journalism in the hope of acquiring wealth or fame. Nor will it be a new source of grief to us, if, in consequence of any disaster overwhelming the vernacular press, this country should once again be enveloped in its pristine darkness.

We could have appreciated Mr Eden's nobleness (of disposition) if after reproving the vernacular newspapers he had done something for their improvement. If he only chooses he can by various means secure the improvement of the vernacular newspapers. On the other hand, his glory would not be greatly increased if he aimed at the suppression of the vernacular newspapers by insulting them and holding out threats to them. If he destroys one of the chief means for the improvement of the country, whose welfare has been placed in his keeping, history will record the fact in characters of black.'

The *Somprokash* was in those days the premier Bengali weekly. In its issue of 24th December, 1877, it published an article under the heading 'The Way to Gag the Native Press', which ran as follows and from which the Government made a fairly long extract to justify the proposed Press Bill:

Many cannot understand why Mr Eden should have thought fit to abuse the native editors before a number of gentlemen who had been invited to Belvedere. But others think that His Honour has resolved to gag the Vernacular newspapers and this is but a prelude to that act. We cannot, however, understand the meaning of this. How will he do this unless indeed he takes away the freedom of the whole newspaper press which is by no means an easy task under the British administration. We can clearly perceive that if Mr Eden were to issue any order restricting, even partially, the freedom of the Press, the editors of the Anglo-Indian papers would not tamely submit to such an order. Hence there would be necessity to divide that order into two parts. By one the liberty of the Anglo-Indian journals would remain intact; by the other

the liberty of the Vernacular journals would be taken away. We do not, however, believe that the British Government has really so much degraded that it would enact such an one-sided law. And if such a law is asked for they would, certainly, we believe, question its necessity. If the Vernacular Press is seditious, there is already a law to repress sedition: there are courts of law. Let complaints be lodged against them in the regularly constituted courts of the land, and let their mouths be gagged here. If the British Government hold these views, it will be rather difficult for Mr Eden to be successful in his efforts to gag the press; and he will be placed in a very awkward position. But in order to relieve Mr Eden from all anxiety on this score we propose pointing out to him an easy and beautiful means to gag the mouth of the Vernacular Press. Let him with other officers of Government follow it, and he will attain his object without any difficulty. He will not expose himself to obloquy or ridicule, and he will secure that upon which he has set his heart. When there is such a means why should he have recourse to more difficult methods? An author has remarked that if a disease which can be cured by bitter medicine can also be cured by crystal sugar, what patient is there that would not prefer the sugar to the bitter medicine. The easy means to which we have alluded are as follows:

The authorities should cease to make any distinction between black and white, the native and foreigner, the conqueror and the conquered, and whether in the court, durbar, or the, council, should seek to regard all classes of the community with equal impartiality, enact equal laws, give them appointments of equal value, according to merit and ability, award condign punishments to high-handed Europeans, whether official or non-official. If these measures be adopted, Mr. Eden will see that the mouth of the Native press will of itself be stopped. Heenan was at night-time seen prowling about the house of another man. The servants, according to the order of the master of the house, went in pursuit of him. He shot one of the men dead. It was not the case that Heenan

was not aware that a pistol-shot would kill the man. Nor was it necessary for Heenan to shoot down the man in self-defence, for the servant did not go to kill but to seize him. If they meant to kill him they would have gone armed, and Govinda (the man who was murdered) would never have caught Heenan by his legs to prevent him from running away. It was not that Heenan did not understand all this (and kill the man in sheer ignorance of his intentions). There was another serious charge against him, namely, that he always walked about armed with a pistol. Govinda was surely not like a beast or a bird, an object of the chase, and yet Heenan felt no hesitation in killing him. For this serious crime he received only 18 months' imprisonment, while Janoki Nath Roy was sentenced to three months' imprisonment and fined Rs. 20,000 for giving false evidence, whether inadvertently or intentionally. In both cases the jury recommended the accused to mercy. We ask Mr. Eden to weigh the sentences in the scales of justice, and say if they are right.

Natives were occasionally led to expect that they would be appointed District Judges. The subject has been allowed to drop since Mr Eden became Lieutenant Governor. A Magistrate, the other day, assaulted an unoffending native, whose only fault was that he was washing his mouth when the officer passed by, and did not make his *salam*. If the person assaulted had sufficient strength and courage he too would have turned round and assaulted his assailant. And the spectators would no doubt have felt their curiosity amply satisfied.

What punishment was even awarded to this Magistrate, and how is it that he has been left in charge of a district ? So long as the authorities do not redress these wrongs, their utmost efforts to gag the Native Press will never be successful. Should they do this illegally and by force, another mouth will forthwith be opened. In conclusion we respectfully ask Mr Eden not to be angry with us.

We have but given him a bit of salutary advice, which however, according to the poet is scarcely agreeable.

Another extract was from the *Hindu Hitaishinee* of Dacca, dated 10th March, 1877, from an article under the heading 'Evil Effects of Drinking'.

It chills one's blood (literally dries one's blood) to contemplate the terrible evils which drink is creating in our midst. Even immediately after the first arrival of the English in this country, there were hardly more than one or two gentlemen in any village who used to drink, and amongst the lower orders there was perhaps an individual here and there who would smoke *ganja*. But they had a very bad repute in society. After this, when Government found that there was a very good means of gain in it, it began to encourage the liquor traffic. If we are now to compare the past with the present, it would seem as if a *yuga* has intervened, so completely are times altered. We have heard, and Dr Wilson has clearly shown in his report, that whereas there was only one liquor shop in Dacca before, there are a hundred now. Good Musalmans and the Krishna-Mantri Hindus considered it a sin even to touch wine; their descendants are now founders and protectors of grog-shops. Persons of respectable families never owned any grog-shops, and if they ~~were~~ in any way connected with such an establishment, they ~~were~~ exposed to obloquy and not unoften excommunicated.

Nowadays wine is considered as one of the principal articles of trade, and it has become the guardian divinity of almost every household. The Salgram Chakra (symbol of Vishnu) is not now so much honoured as wine. This wine is the index of the modern civilisation of the West. A person will not be honoured in the society of our educated men unless he has learnt to drink. The number of drunkards is gradually increasing, both among Hindus and Musalmans. Christians have been mainly instrumental in propagating a taste for wine. They themselves have not been ruined by it, but are encompassing the ruin of others. Once on a time a rich man of Nababpore had a certain disease in his thigh and legs. A doctor advised him to rub brandy over those places. The

patient did not at first consent to the proposal, but, being quite helpless, he at last agreed to it, which however made him very uneasy. In a separate room he would have his body rubbed over with spirituous liquors. The servant who performed this duty was never allowed to touch his food, or the things connected with the performance of his devotional duties. He would change his dress at once, and would not enter any other room without having had his bath. Now, if you enquire, you will find his descendants are the slaves of intoxicating drinks; they do not consider their mouth or their homes purified without such drink.

A few days ago a *mukhtear* became so excited with drink in the house of a prostitute that while he was coming down the steps from the upper to the ground floor he lost his footing and rolled down to the floor below. He received such terrible injuries on the head and other parts of the body that he became quite insensible. He is now under medical treatment, but his life is said to be in a precarious state. On another occasion a doctor who was rolling in a drain close by a street was about to fall under a carriage, but was saved through the kindness of a gentleman. At another time a Deputy Magistrate who came to Dacca for an examination, could not appear on the second day of the examination as he was quite drunk. Moreover, if anybody were to note all the horrible things that have occurred at Dacca in consequence of drinking, it would form a work as bulky as the Bengal Administration Report. At the corner of almost every lane, and by the sides of streets and in bazars, there are shops selling *ganja* or opium or intoxicating liquors. All classes of people resort to these places in large number. The vendors cheat them out of their money in various ways. Although the Government has increased the excise duty and licence fee, still the number of drunkards and taste for intoxicating drinks instead of decreasing have been increasing. The profits of Government have, no doubt increased ten-fold, but then a great number of people of this country are being ruined. Drink does greater injury to the people than gambling. There

is nothing else but drink which can do all sorts of injury, pecuniary, physical and mental. We have some very influential men who died at a very premature age from the effects of drinking; some others have become completely useless; and there are others who through the same cause are on the high road to ruin. Who will not feel grieved at seeing the country in such a wretched state? The Government cannot do anything to prevent the evil until it consents to forego the profits it obtains from spirituous liquors.

It does not become the ruling power to gain money by a means so detrimental to the interest of its subjects and so opposed to humane principles of government.

These extracts were certainly a very fair indication of the tone and temper of the politically-minded Bengal of those days. Whether they justified Lord Lytton's Press Act was another question. The Indian press had been set free from all manner of official restraint except what could be used through the ordinary criminal law of the country, in the interest of the foreign government itself. It helped the British rulers of the people to get at least a glimpse of the mind of their subjects. To deprive it of this freedom was to deprive the government itself of a medium of knowing what passed in the mind of their subjects. The popular slogan was that to interfere with the freedom of the press in India was like sitting on a safety valve. Lord Lytton's Government, however, took another view. The press might inform the government the state of public feeling in the country but at the same time it was also an effective agent for the creation of that feeling itself. It was to provide against this last contingency that Lord Lytton's Press Act was framed.

The Indian Association convened a public meeting of the inhabitants of Calcutta at the Town Hall. The Lytton Administration had commenced to demoralise the aristocratic sections of the community. The British Indian Association representing the Bengal zemindars refused to join this meeting. But the educated middle class not only of Calcutta and Bengal but practically of the other provinces also fully supported this protest of the Indian

Association. Mr Ananda Mohan Bose, as secretary of the Indian Association and convenor of this public meeting read a large number of communications received from among others, the Bombay Association, the Cawnpore Association, the Allahabad Indian Association, the Seetavaldee Native Club (Nagpur), as also the resolution of a public meeting held to protest against the new Act at Nagpur. The political life in Bengal created by the Indian Association and Babu Surendra Nath Banerjee had already organised itself in numerous political associations in the Bengal districts, namely, the Barisal People's Association, the Bogra People's Association, the Mymensingh Association, the Senhati People's Association, the Bhajanghata Indian Association, the Meherpore Indian Association, the Chittagong Association, the Rajshahi Association, the Contai Association and the Dacca People's Association. All these were evidences of the birth of a new political consciousness and patriotic endeavour in the country.

The Sheriff of Calcutta was asked to convene this public meeting, but he refused to do so. This refusal created considerable nervousness in many people, who were afraid to join it. Indeed, it was felt at one time that it would not be safe to join this demonstration, and the leaders of it ran the risk of being clapped into prison. But neither Surendra Nath nor Ananda Mohan were deterred from doing what was an obvious public duty by fear of its political consequences. Rev. Dr K.M. Banerjee, the President of the Indian Association, also was not afraid to take the chair at this meeting. In opening the proceedings he said: "When the object was the consideration of a petition on a certain measure of the Indian Government, it could not be unconstitutional in any sense of the term; and the Sheriff's refusal to give to the inhabitants of Calcutta an opportunity of meeting in the most regular and constitutional way in their own city was deeply to be regretted." Discussing the business before the meeting he summarised it in four questions:

1. Whether, assuming the possibility of objectional matter in a few vernacular papers, they were sufficient to exhibit an

absolute necessity for an Act which no one denies is opposed to the general principles of the English constitution?

2. Whether the necessity was so urgent and pressing that the safety of the public required the new Press Bill to be rapidly passed into law at one sitting without publication, by the suspension of the standing rules of the legislature.
3. Whether or not the Act so passed is fraught with any actual injury or mischief as regards social improvement and the good government of the country?
4. Whether, in any case, the present movement for a petition to the Imperial Legislature in England can result in any good?

This Press Act was really a piece of panic legislation. True it is that recent events, particularly the deposition of the Gaikwad and the Wahabi case, and the revival of an obsolete regulation to arrest and detain without trial the leader of the Wahabis, and in Bengal the retrograde educational policy of Sir George Campbell aiming at the practical abolition of higher English education, had created considerable unrest in the educated community, who had been led to hope that their intellectual, moral and political regeneration would come from British rule. This unrest found outspoken expression in our vernacular press. The writing of this vernacular press frightened the British officials in the country, and even created considerable nervousness in Great Britain. The British people and Parliament had not as yet been able to completely forget the lessons of the Sepoy Mutiny. Twenty years was not really a sufficiently long period to work out the dark fear caused by the Mutiny. Dr K.M. Banerjee in his speech from the chair referred to this panic. "India," he said, "is at present under a dark suspicion of being given to disloyalty, treason, and all sedition, privy conspiracy and rebellion." It was this suspicion which prompted some of the English papers to laud the Act; it was the same suspicion for the members of Parliament were afraid to touch the subject. And the chairman urged that this Act was bound to encourage the enemies of the Queen and damn the spirit of India's friends. Concluding, he said:

The meeting, by disavowing and repudiating the remotest idea of such disloyalty and manifesting its confidence in Parliament, will reassure friends as well as stop the mouths and confound the hopes of the Queen's enemies, hopes which may be supposed to be fostered by the gratuitous suspicion of India's loyalty at this critical moment.

The nervousness displayed in this apology for holding this meeting was, however, not merely a diplomatic move on the part of the promoters to save their skin. Educated Indian opinion in those days sincerely wanted the continuance of British rule. The generation to which they belonged had not completely forgotten the state of their country from which the British had recovered it. The last days of the Mogul Empire were marked by universal anarchy and disorder. Almost every man's hand was against his neighbour. Neither person nor property, and not infrequently even the honour of their women, were safe from the attacks of the turbulent elements of society. The British had replaced that reign of terror by a new reign of law. In the sixties of the last century even village urchins in distant and out of the way places used to cry out for protection from the British 'Company' when attacked by their playmates. *Dohai Company Bahadur* was a familiar cry in those days. Our educated people still remembered these traditions. Their professions of loyalty to the British Queen and the British Government were therefore absolutely sincere notwithstanding their criticism of the acts and policies of the Indian Government. A feature of this protest meeting was the association of representative Britishers with it. The first resolution was moved by Dr K.S. Macdonald, the head of the Scottish Churches Mission in Calcutta. Dr Macdonald belonged to the earlier generation of Christian missionaries who always studied to make friends with the people of this country. Alexander Duff, the founder of this Scottish mission in Calcutta, had completely identified himself with every progressive movement in his country of adoption. Duff was a friend of Ram Mohan Roy, and was equally intimate with Sir Radhakanta Dev, the representative of Hindu orthodoxy.

Dr Macdonald followed the traditions of Dr Duff in his relations with the leaders of the Bengalee community.

Though the members of the British Indian Association refused to join this protest, the committee appointed at this meeting to draw up the petition to the Parliament was as representative of the culture and wealth of Calcutta as any committee could possibly be. Ananda Mohan Bose was appointed its secretary, and the members were:

Rev. K.M. Banerjee, L.L.D.,
 T. Palit, Esq.,
 Babu Chunder Madhab Ghosh,
 Rev. K.S. Macdonald,
 Babu Dwijendra Nath Tagore,
 Babu Jogesh Chandra Dutt,
 Babu Rash Behary Ghosh,
 Babu Bhairab Chunder Banerjee,
 Babu Probodh Chunder Mullik,
 Babu Nitto Lal Mullik,
 Babu Jagannath Khanna,
 Dr Gurudas Banerjee,
 Babu Nabagopal Mitter,
 Babu Kalinath Mitter,
 Babu Gonesh Chunder Chunder.

This Act was passed as a 'preventive' measure. It was believed by the government that the passing of this Act would prevent the dissemination of sedition in the community. But the leading Bengalee journals stopped publication the very day this Act was passed. And this practical protest against it roused far more feeling in the community than what the so-called seditious preachings of these papers had been able to do. The *Somprakash*, the *Nabavibhakar*, the *Sadharanee* and other leading Bengalee papers refused to continue their work under the humiliating conditions of the new Press Act. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, however, converted itself into an English weekly almost overnight and thus went outside the jurisdiction of this Act.

The Vernacular Press Act was not the only retrograde and unpopular measure of Lord Lytton's Government. Next year, 1878, the Arms Act was passed aiming at the wholesale emasculation of the Indian subjects of the British Queen. Like the Vernacular Press Act, the Arms Act was also a discriminating measure. Not only the British subjects in India but the subjects of every foreign state temporarily or permanently residing in India were exempt from the operation of this Act. The Hottentot and the Zulu could carry arms while walking along the streets of Calcutta or Bombay, but the native Indian subject of the British Government could not do so. Even more than the Vernacular Press Act this Arms Act wounded our national self-respect. And the feeling of resentment against it was, though not so vocal, much wider than that aroused by the Vernacular Press Act. By these measures Lord Lytton instead of reconciling the political consciousness in the country to British rule, which was certainly not difficult at that early stage, helped to create and strengthen a new anti-British feeling among our people.

Chapter 15

HOW I CAME TO THE BRAHMO SAMAJ



It is queer story which reveals at once my personal character and the character of the times to which I belonged. Freedom in the sense of revolt against restraint was an inherited instinct in me. My father as well as my mother were both endowed with very strong wills. This developed in me almost into wilfulness. I always resented all manner of compulsion. I was too proud to accept the law of my life from anybody else. This is why though we had a Brahmo Samaj in Sylhet and some of my class-mates organised a students' prayer meeting in connection with the Samaj there, I stood out of it. When I came to Calcutta the same 'cussedness' led me to take up a more or less openly hostile attitude towards the Brahmo Samaj, at that time almost at the very zenith of its glory. A relation of my sister, her husband's younger brother, had come to Calcutta and entered the university about two years before me. He had openly joined the Brahmo Samaj and was an inmate of the Brahmo Students' Home, called the Brahmo Niketan, at 13 Mirzapore Street. This Home was the centre of Brahmo propaganda. It was overlooked by a missionary of Keshub, and they had regular daily worships as well as weekly conversational meetings in the Home. This Niketan was in those days a prominent Brahmo institution in Calcutta. This relation of my sister was a zealous propagandist. As soon as I came to Calcutta he commenced to preach to me and tried his best to induce me to join the Brahmo Samaj. All this had, however, a different effect upon my mind. Instead of drawing me to the Brahmo Samaj it repelled me from it. I not only stood out of the movement but joined the large body of scoffers of it.

A few days previous to my arrival in Calcutta the Brahmo Samaj had suffered a serious setback through the ugly revelations regarding the management of the Bharat Ashram which was started as a home for Brahmo families run by Keshub and his missionaries. Keshub had his old family dwelling house in Colootola and he maintained his connections with it and continued to live there, though he spent the greater part of his day in the Bharat Ashram. His wife also regularly attended Divine Service in the Ashram. Missionaries of Brahmo Samaj who had no family dwelling house in Calcutta all resided in the Ashram with their wives and children. Many leading members of the Brahmo laity also took up their residence with their families in this Home. The ideal of those days was to build up a communistic organisation, so far as might be, of the adherents of the Brahmo Samaj. They were to be a 'family' tied together by sincere love and affection, having no private or personal interests and owning God Himself as the Father or *Paterfamilias* of this community. The Bharat Ashram tried to give material shape and organised constitution to this ideal. The materials, however, with which Keshub tried to build up this 'family of love' were not ripe for it. The inheritances of the decadent Hindu joint family, that had commenced to breed intense selfishness and jealousy between the members and unseemly scramble over petty things, were brought to this new Home by the ladies of the Brahmo converts. Nor can it be justly said that the male members of the Ashram were absolutely free from the influences of their womenfolk. Differences and disputes between the inmates became thus inevitable. These grew to such an extent that the story of these quarrels soon found publication in the Bengalee press. Side by side with these unfortunate revelations of the life of the Brahmo families in the Ashram, there arose a dispute over the proprietary rights in the Calcutta School (which subsequently became the Albert School and developed later into the Albert College, of which Babu Krishna Behari Sen, Keshub's younger brother was the rector) between Keshub and one of his Brahmo followers, Babu Haranath Bose. Ugly rumours also commenced to be circulated regarding some of the inmates of the Ashram. In a letter to the press a most

violent attack was made on Keshub and his Ashram. This convulsed not only the Brahmos but more or less the whole of the educated community of Bengal. The scandal became so serious that the matter had to be taken to court on a charge of defamation. It was, if I remember aright, subsequently settled out of court. But the evil odour of it clung for many years to Keshub and the Brahmo Samaj generally. The Ashram broke up.

When I came to Calcutta the Niketan or the Students' Home was the only public institution connected with the Brahmo Samaj, with which I came to be acquainted through the relation mentoined above. The Niketan made no appeal to me. The inmates of the Niketan were, almost all of them, more religious than human. In fact, the natural humanity of the general body of Brahmo youngmen of my generation was almost completely overwhelmed by their religiosity. They were almost always talking of sin and salvation, of prayer and divine worship. All these, fortunately or unfortunately, had as yet no living reference to my life and ideals. In the Brahmo Samaj itself there were dissentients from this excessive and abnormal religiosity which was being sought to be cultivated by Keshub Chunder Sen. Babu Jyotirindra Nath Tagore had about this time brought out (I think anonymously) a vitriolic satire on the unrealities of current Brahmo ideals and practices. It was named *Yatkinchit Jalayog*. One of the characters in this farce, a Brahmo leader, was presented as constantly sinning and repenting of his sin. All these unrealities of the current ideals and practices of the Samaj seriously influenced the generation of youthful students to which I belonged. I had therefore not only no attraction for the Brahmo Samaj when I first came to Calcutta, but even felt an increasing repulsion towards it. In the Sylhet students' mess the general atmosphere was certainly anti-Brahmo. The only Brahmo member of our mess was Sundari Mohan Das. But his Brahmoism was not of an aggressive type. His loyalty to his religious principles in no way overwhelmed his natural human instincts or made him a sour and sullen young man constantly afraid of being contaminated with sin. Sundari Mohan was a normal young man who freely entered into all the frolics of our

youthful nature and never permitted his Brahmoism to interfere with the innocent enjoyments of life. Indeed, he even shared with us the current satires on Brahmo ideals and life. But for the sweetness of his personality and the absolute non-aggressiveness of Brahmoism, I fear I should never have joined the Brahmo Samaj.

From the very day when Sundari Mohan going home to Sylhet during his first summer vacation called me out of my class and congratulated me upon my early journalistic enterprises a new romance had been born in our youthful friendship. This rapidly grew upon my arrival in Calcutta and the constant companionship in which I lived outside our college hours with him. In the Sylhet mess we shared the same room and gradually had a common purse. Our mess-mates even made our romantic attachment the subject of little ballads. But these intimacies notwithstanding, Sundari Mohan never tried to convert me to his religious views.

The new Bengalee stage had at this time very great influence upon my mind. About a couple of years previously women had been first introduced into our national stage. They were inevitably outside the social pale. The Brahmo Samaj in the name of public morals entered a strong protest against this new development in the Bengalee stage. The Brahmos, as a class, considered it sinful to attend the performances of these public women. Sundari Mohan, however, did not accept this Brahmic interdiction. He freely went to the two theatres that we had then in Calcutta, the Bengal Theatre and the National Theatre, both of which were situate in Beadon Street. Instead of condemning this new development in the Bengali stage as immoral we really welcomed it as opening an honourable occupation for the class of women from whom our actresses were being drawn. A few months previous to my arrival in Calcutta one of the leading actresses, Shreematee Sukumaree, had been married under Act II of 1877 to an actor, Babu Haridas Datta, both of the Bengal Theatre. A leading Brahmo, Babu Nagendra Nath Chatterjee, officiated as minister in this marriage. It created a great sensation in Calcutta society, both in and outside the Brahmo Samaj. When I came to Calcutta, these two were prominent personalities, particularly

the actress, in our theatre. Though the example of these prominent members of the Bengalee stage was not followed by others, as was expected at the time, yet it did to some extent indicate a healthy line of evolution, and the very possibility of such unions somewhat removed the moral ban against our stage.

But whatever might be the private character of the actors and actresses, the plays generally put on the board of these theatres were exceptionally pure and inspiring. Dinabandhu Mitra was in those days one of the most favourite of our dramatists. Dinabandhu's dramas were instinct with both a lofty social idealism and a high standard of ethical conduct. His *Nabin Tapasvini* really presented the Brahmo ideal of social and domestic life in fascinating colours. His *Sadhabar Ekadashee* was a glowing picture of the evils of intemperance that had attacked the new generation of our English-educated countrymen. His *Jamai Barik* or the Son-in-Laws' Barrack was a burning satire on the practice of some of the richer families in Calcutta who refused to allow their daughters to go to their husbands' homes and families but had their sons-in-law domesticated in their own homes as more or less dependents on their wives. Those were the days of social reform and political freedom, and the stage fully represented these intellectual and moral currents flowing over the educated Bengalee community. It was indirectly doing the very work to which the Brahmo Samaj had consecrated itself. The members of our mess, including Sundari Mohan, were frequent visitors to the Bengal and the National Theatres.

The *Bangadarshan* on the one side, and the Bengalee theatres on the other, exerted very considerable influence upon me, and quickened very forcibly my literary endeavours and aspirations. This passion for literary culture possessed me to such an extent that I neglected my university studies and spent most of my time in reading Bengalee books and English dramas and novels. And this passion for Bengalee literature was an indirect cause of my coming to the Brahmo Samaj.

Sundari Mohan and myself were, as has already been mentioned, constant companions outside our college hours. But on Sunday evenings he used regularly to go to the Brahmo Samaj

in Mechua Bazar Street. These Sunday evenings hang, therefore, heavily upon my mind. I felt exceedingly lonely. After a while instead of staying by myself at home I commenced to go to the Samaj with Sundari Mohan. But while he went to pray I went to sit by him and doze or sleep. After some time one day in course of conversation Sundari Mohan suggested that if I really wanted to be a Bengalee writer and speaker I could not do better than listen attentively to the Service of Keshub Chunder Sen in the Brahmo Mandir as Keshub was universally recognised as a master of Bengalee diction and oratory. This found me a new incentive and a new employment for my mind during Sunday evenings. I no longer went to the Samaj to doze, but brought all my intelligence and thought to the service conducted by the Brahmo leader. In this way I felt unconsciously drawn to the Brahmo Samaj.

But I was all the same a mere worshipper at the gate. My interest in the services of the Brahmo Samaj was merely intellectual and literary. I really had no lot or part in the religious and spiritual exercises of these weekly services. All my early religion was prompted by fear. I prayed to Kalee and Durga during the serious illness of those whom I loved, asking their intervention for the cure and the life of my dear ones. Though I had certainly advanced considerably intellectually from that earliest stage, spiritually I still occupied the same plane. The general body of Brahmos prayed for salvation from sin. There was no sense of sin in me, and consequently there was no call to me for praying for salvation. The God to whom the Brahmos prayed was still to me what St. Paul called an Unknown God. I had commenced no doubt to speculate regarding the Godhead or what I would now call the Ultimate Reality. I did believe instinctively in a First Cause. But when I commenced to reason about it, I was forced to posit not one but two First Causes, one Spirit and the other Matter. God was the fashioner of the universe. He was, as I subsequently came to know, the Efficient Cause of this creation. But He was not, and could not possibly be, I thought, the Material Cause of it. God and Matter were equally eternal and infinite and they co-existed with each other. This was my crude theology, and not, of course, the theology of the Brahmo Samaj. But it was

really not the theology of the Samaj that gradually drew me to it. The God of the Brahmo Samaj was to me as much an unknown God as the numerous deities of the Hindu pantheon. All that I felt in my helplessness, when brought face to face with disease and death, was that like the old Hindu gods and goddesses, this Brahmo God stood for that unknown and supernatural Power which directed the weal or woe of men and women. And in my helplessness in the face of disease and apprehension of death my heart or my soul, whatever it may be called, went up in supplication to this Brahmo God as it had done in my boyhood to the Hindu gods and goddesses.

In 1876 having passed the first examination in Arts Sundari Mohan entered the Medical College. In the summer of that year he went home to Sylhet. We had, as already mentioned, to pass through Dacca and Naraingunj on our way from Calcutta to Sylhet. The steamer service between Dacca, Naraingunj and Sylhet was very irregular. Sundari Mohan had to stay at Dacca' on his way home to Sylhet for a few days. News reached me at this time that an epidemic of cholera had broken out at Dacca. This made me exceedingly nervous about Sundari Mohan, and I commenced to pray to God after the manner of the Brahmo Samaj for the safety of my friend. Twice or thrice every day I commenced to sit by myself in the solitude of my bedroom and send up my supplications to God to protect Sundari Mohan in the perilous position in which he must have found himself at Dacca in the midst of a virulent cholera epidemic. This habit continued for some time even after Sundari Mohan had safely reached his home, and led ultimately to the organisation of a weekly prayer meeting in our mess to which we commenced now and then to invite one of the missionaries of the Brahmo Samaj of India.

But it is very doubtful if these spiritual or religious exercises would have forced me into the Brahmo fold. Another incident of a very far-reaching character had happened already in the winter of 1876. On the occasion of the Prince's visit a Sanskrit address from the Pandits of Sylhet had been sent to the Royal visitor. The full text of it was published in the local weekly, the *Sreehatta Prakash*. Babu Peary Mohan Das, who had in the winter of 1874

been accused of murdering a Eurasian in Wellington Square and had been convicted of culpable homicide not amounting to murder and sentenced to three months' imprisonment, had on his release from prison gone home to Sylhet and started this paper. The story of that case attracted very wide publicity at the time. It was regarded as what would now be called a *Swadeshi* case. Peary Mohan was employed at that time in a government office in Calcutta, and was living in a mess somewhere in the neighbourhood of Wellington Square. On his way home from office he saw a Eurasian young man committing nuisance in the Square. He stared at him at which this young man came and picked up a quarrel with him. In course of this altercation, Peary Mohan brought out a steel eraser from his pocket and stabbed this young man, from which he died. Peary Mohan was arrested and accused on this charge and put up for his trial before the sessions at the Calcutta High Court. This case evoked almost universal sympathy for him. It roused considerable racial feeling on both sides. After serving his sentence out Peary Mohan, who had lost his place in consequence of it, retired to his native district and set up a press and started this weekly newspaper. In 1876 Babu Manohar Ghosh, a member of the Bengalee Christian community of Calcutta, went as editor of this paper to Sylhet, and he was mainly instrumental in getting up this Sanskrit address and publishing the text of it in his paper. It seemed to us young Sylhet students in Calcutta, a very poor production, unworthy of the reputation which Sylhet had from olden times of Sanskrit culture. We raised our voice against it and publicly condemned it through the columns of the *Sreehatta Prakash*. The editor published a rejoinder. And thus started a controversy over the merits of this Sanskrit address. We were all young students, and could not possibly pose as authority in Sanskrit versification or rhetoric. We therefore approached Pandit Shivanath Shastri for his opinion. Shivanath Shastri was at that time employed as Head Pandit of the Hare School. He was believed to have already been marked out for the chair of Sanskrit in the Presidency College and ultimately for the post of Principal of the Sanskrit College itself. He characterised the Sylhet Pandits' address frankly as a

doggerel. This introduction to Shivanath Shastri very largely determined the future course of my religious and social evolution.

Shivanath had won high distinction in the University. He had taken his M.A. degree from the Sanskrit College, and had received the title of Shastri from his alma mater. His father had been a Sanskrit Pandit of the old type. His maternal uncle Dwarkanath Vidyabhusan had been a teacher in the Sanskrit College. Vidyabhusan was also the editor of the premier weekly Bengalee newspaper of those days, the *Somprakas*. Government servants were not as yet strictly forbidden to have any manner of connection with the newspaper press. Babu Bhudeb Mukherjee had started a weekly newspaper of his own, namely, the *Education Gazette*. He also owned the press from which this *Education Gazette* was issued. Though it was specially devoted to the discussion of educational topics and circulation of the news of the government Education Department, the *Education Gazette* did not absolutely exclude discussion of general topics of public interest, including politics. *Somprakas* was, however, a professedly political newspaper, and it had always been absolutely outspoken in its criticism of public policies and measures. And Shivanath had been trained by his uncle as a Bengalee writer. Dwarkanath Vidyabhusan never joined the Brahmo Samaj and always criticised what was regarded by him as the revolutionary doctrines of Keshub Chunder Sen and the progressive Brahmos. But the *Somprakas* had at one time, before the revolt of Keshub against Devendra Nath, been a supporter of the old Brahmo Samaj. I think, like Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Dwarkanath Vidyabhusan was also a member of the *Tattvabodhini Sabha*. Vidyabhusan exerted very considerable influence in the making of Shivanath's mind and character.

After passing out of the university with high distinction Shivanath started life as a school master at Bhowanipore, where he was the headmaster of the South Suburban School. From there he entered the Government Education Service and was posted as the senior Sanskrit teacher in the Hare School. It was about this time that I made his acquaintance. He was living then at the back of the Presidency College in Bhawani Charan Dutt's

Lane. Our first visit to him was repeated even after the question of the address presented to His Royal Highness by the Sylhet Pandits had ceased to engage our attention. In that address Oxford had been rendered into Sanskrit as *oxavataran*. Shivanath, asked concerning the correctness of this translation, said that almost any combination of sounds in any language could be given a meaning in Sanskrit. Years after, speaking on this subject he cited an anecdote. A lady missionary one day placed a Bengali Christian tract in his hand. In this tract Jesus Christ was described as *Narayana*. Shivanath smiled at this attempt to Hinduise Christianity. The lady missionary pointedly asked him what was it that drew that smile from him. He referred to the use of the word *Narayana* to describe Jesus. What is wrong, asked his hostess. *Nara*, she went on, means humanity, and *ayana* means refuge; *Narayana* means the refuge of mankind, and that is exactly the position of Christ in Christian thought and culture; He is the refuge of mankind. Shivanath said, there is no word in the English or in any other language which could not be interpreted by Sanskrit grammar and lexicon. As examples, he cited the English word rascal. Following the method by which *Narayana* has been made to mean Jesus Christ, the word rascal might very well apply to Sree Krishna of the Hindu pantheon. *Rasa* means the particular kind of dance referred to in the *Bhagabata*. Sree Krishna used to sport with the *gopinees* in this *rasa* dance. He who sports in the *rasa* dance is in Sanskrit *rasakela* or rascal. The lady asked if he could give a Sanskrit meaning to her name. Yes, why not, replied the Pandit; tell me your name, and I shall explain it in Sanskrit. Her name was Emmi Barbara. Shivanath replied Emmi means come, Barbara means one whose greatest element is water in other words, a fish. Emmi Barbara means that which has come from the fish; continuing he said that the very common word 'stupid' in English bears practically the same meaning in Sanskrit also. He who pulverises or tramples under foot his own good is according to Sanskrit grammar and lexicon a stupid.

Shivanath, though one of the proudest products of his college in our university, was in his conduct and conversations almost as

simple as a child. He never gave himself any airs, and we young men who went to him for his opinion on the Sanskrit address of the Sylhet Pandits were strangely drawn to him by his geniality. That first visit was repeated until some of us became almost like members of his family. Shivanath's Brahmoism was more attractive to me than that of Keshub and his missionaries. It had in those days a stronger note of rationalism than the prevailing Brahmo doctrines. Above all, Shivanath's Brahmo ideal was more instinct with the spirit of freedom and individualism of middle 19th century European culture than the ideal of Keshub Chunder Sen and his intimate missionary group. Shivanath's piety was of the type preached and cultivated by Theodore Parker, particularly in his volume of Sermons. Social freedom and national emancipation were both organic elements of Shivanath's religion and piety. In all this there was very close affinity between our youthful ideals and those of the Brahmo Samaj, as represented by Shivanath. Endowed with a very high order of poetic genius, Shivanath had already secured a place for himself in the renaissance literature of Bengal. To him belonged the great distinction of bringing to our new patriotism and politics the inspiration of a lofty ethical ideal. Some of the utterances from his first lyrical publication *Pushpamala* had become current coin in the thoughts and ideals of young Bengal. Educated Bengalees of those times were, as a class, living a very free life of undisciplined appetites and unrestrained passions. The drink habit had, as I have already noted elsewhere, in reference to the temperance propaganda of Peary Charan Sircar, got its stranglehold on the finest flowers of our university. Dinabandhu Mitra's *Sadhabar Ekadashee* immortalised the type of educated young Bengal as familiar with Shakespeare and Milton as with the strong wines of European vineyards. Shivanath used his pen with relentless sarcasm against the Indian patriot who sang the glories of his motherland and dedicated his life to her service during the day and at night gave himself up to all sorts of self-indulgences. Slaves of their appetites and passions, cried Shivanath, how can they be serious about their country and their nation? Political emancipation is impossible without social emancipation and

personal purity. Freedom is one and indivisible. The political freedom of the social or sacerdotal slave is a myth and a fancy. However pleasant it may be to the sentimentalist, it can never be either attained, or if attained through some chance it can never be sustained by a people who are not emancipated in their mind and who do not follow the same principles of freedom in their personal, their domestic and their social life. This was the main teaching of Shivanath's new poetry. In this as a matter of course, he gave voice to the high ideals of the Brahmo Samaj. Here he was at one with Keshub and his missionary group. With Shivanath, however, not only was political emancipation impossible without personal purity and social reconstruction built upon the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity, but even the realisation of man's spiritual destiny or his salvation, as it was called by all the ancient religions, was equally impossible unless these ideals of equality, liberty and fraternity were fully organised in his personal life, his social relations and in the constitution of his national state. It was here that Shivanath's ideal of piety differed, though perhaps not in theory but certainly in emphasis and practice, from the prevailing ideals of even the Brahmo Samaj under the leadership of Keshub Chunder Sen and his missionary group. It was this larger and completer ideal of freedom of Shivanath Shastri that drew me to the Brahmo Samaj far more powerfully than the preachings of Keshub had been able to do.

About the middle of 1876 we organised under Shivanath's leadership a society of our own that differed from the political societies organised under Surendranath's inspiration in this that it combined the religious and social idealism of the Brahmo Samaj with the political idealism of Surendranath.

In fact, the political aspect of it was distinctly subordinated to its ethical and spiritual aspects. The political ideal was governed by the ideals of personal freedom and social equality. The original copy of the pledge which we signed was lost many years ago, how we never found out. It was a remarkable document drawn up by Pandit Shivanath. The first article of it pledged the members to put up a strenuous and uncompromising fight against current image-worship and caste-domination in the Hindu society. This

was called for by the supremacy of individual reason for the determination of religious faith and duty. It was equally an assertion of the absolute supremacy of the individual conscience in the determination of all ethical questions and the regulation of all social relations. This fight was called for in the pursuit of the modern ideal of equality, liberty and fraternity. The next article of this pledge was distinctly political. It started with the declaration that "self-government is the only form of political government *ordained by God*." The first implication of it, though not explained in so many words in the pledge, was that the existing government in the country not being self-government in the sense of government of the people, by the people and for the people, was not really ordained by God, and this government had therefore no moral title to the allegiance of the people. This was practically a declaration of revolt. But Pandit Shivanath and those who were with him did not ignore existing actualities. These actualities, they believed, were really responsible for their foreign subjection. Self-government was the ideal. It was the only form of state organisation supported by the higher moral law. But the country was not yet fit for self-government. The main cause of its unfitness was the mechanical pursuit of religion and the consequent subservience to un-understood scriptural authority and degrading priestly domination. The removal of these religious and social evils must be the condition-precendent of the reconstitution of the national state upon a truly democratic basis. Pandit Shastri and those who joined him in this small organisation, therefore, while boldly asserting India's right to self-government, recognised at the same time the duty of Indian politicians striving for full self-government for their people, to render lawful obedience to the laws and institutions of the present government, though it could not really claim their moral allegiance. But they added a significant rider to this political declaration to the effect that while obeying the laws and institutions of the present foreign government in the country, they would not, even if faced with extreme poverty and economic destitution and all the miseries consequent upon it, 'take service under this government'. The exact Bengali words were 'never to agree to accept the slavery of this foreign

Government.' The whole idea was that while they refused moral allegiance to this government, from practical considerations they were willing to accept its authority out of regard for existing actualities and the future well-being of the people, but this was the utmost limit of their association with this government. Their sensitive conscience as well as their newly-awakened national self-respect prevented them from making any manner of personal profit through association with an administration, the very foundations of which were fundamentally unmoral, being based upon what is called the Right of Conquest, which meant the assertion of the supremacy of sheer brute force over the universal moral law. The next article in this pledge discussed ways and means for advancing the country to this goal of self-government. Education came here first, the education of the masses, including the education of women; the removal of the disabilities under which the Hindu widows laboured in regard to remarriage, and the breaking down of the *purdah* system. The signatories of this pledge offered to consecrate their lives to these religious and social reforms. But they did not forget or ignore the physical side of national self-government. A people, who do not with their own arms defend their hearth and home against outside invasion, or protect themselves against internal lawlessness and disorder, have no right or claim to govern themselves. The national physique must therefore be simultaneously cultivated and improved along with the national intellect. And every adult member of the nation must be trained in the efficient handling of all instruments and engines for physical struggle. The signatories, therefore, pledged themselves lastly to learn to ride and shoot and preach the duties of acquiring these military trainings and aptitudes to their fellow-countrymen. There was as yet no Arms Act; that Act was passed two years later and every Indian like the citizens of every free state could keep and learn the use of firearms.

It will thus be seen that the ideal which inspired Shivanath Shastri and his youthful friends was on the religious and the spiritual side much fuller than the prevailing ideal even of the Brahmo Samaj itself. It accepted the theology of the Brahmo Samaj of Keshub Chunder Sen, but refused to be restricted in

the pursuit of the fullest personal and social freedom. Keshub had accepted fourteen as the minimum marriageable age for girls and eighteen for boys as laid down in the Civil Marriage Act of 1872. But Shivanath and his youthful following pledged themselves not to marry (if they are unmarried) before the age of twenty-one, nor marry a girl before the age of sixteen nor in any way to help or be associated with marriages wherein the bride was below the age of sixteen and the bridegroom below twenty-one. Keshub and his missionaries did not quite approve of the removal of *zenana* seclusion from the Brahmo Samaj, while this new band of idealists declared openly against every social custom or convention that interfered with the legitimate freedom of social intercourse between the sexes. This new group of young men led by Shivanath Shastri all belonged to the Brahmo Samaj. But the ideal that moved them was much fuller than even the Brahmo ideal of those days. The Brahmo Samaj under Keshub Chunder Sen had hardly any clear political ideal. Its ideal of freedom was practically confined to the religious and the ethical life in the narrow sense of these terms. The Brahmo Samaj under Keshub feared to pursue the fundamental logic of their theology and ethics in the social life to the fullest extent and practically left the political life outside the limits of the religious and the ethical ideals which they pursued. If anything, Keshub's politics accepted the British subjection of India as due to the intervention of God's Special Providence for the salvation of India. He never seemed to have recognised the initial wrong which the political domination of one people over another universally and inevitably inflicts. The very thought of despotic political government in any part of the world deeply wounded the inner susceptibilities of Raja Ram Mohan Roy. Shivanath felt similarly at the sight of political despotism, whether it be in Russia or any other part of the world that had absolutely no reference whatever to his national life; and with him the ideal of self-government in India was as much an organic element of his personal religion and piety as was his repudiation of popular Hindu ceremonialism and the prevailing system of Hindu castes.

Shivanath dreamt of consecrated lives, vowed like the Catholic priesthood not to celibacy but to poverty. Those who joined this group were expected to earn nothing for themselves or their family but to put whatever wages their consecrated work might bring into a common purse from which the wants of themselves and their families would be met. The idea was to form a communist group more or less like the early Christian communists. This idea, however, failed to materialise itself. In fact, no serious attempt was ever made by those who joined this group to practically follow this communist idea. But the other pledges they have followed except just in one instance, where one of the signatories was soon overtaken by an overpowering religious and social reaction that forced him back to the old orthodox fold. But even in his case his change of opinion was absolutely honest and he has been as earnest and uncompromising and as much regardless of whatever consequences the pursuit of his new ideals might lead to in regard to his personal life or the pecuniary prospects of his family as he had been in his ardent youthful days in the Brahmo Samaj. It was a new movement which combined the religious and ethical idealism of the Brahmo Samaj under the ministrations of Keshub Chunder Sen with the new political ideal of which in a special degree Surendra Nath was undoubtedly the greatest apostle. There were Brahmo idealists who were left absolutely cold by the new political inspiration of our educated intellectuals. There were ardent politicians—and their number was very large—who were eagerly desiring the removal of British subjection from their national state and administration, but who were untouched by the spiritual and ethical idealism of the Brahmo Samaj. To Shivanath belongs, in a special measure, the credit of realising the impossibility of attaining the moral and spiritual objective of the Brahmo Samaj without a radical reconstruction of our social life and political government as well as the impossibility of reaching the political goal of democratic self-government unless our national politics was wedded to the ideals of spiritual and social freedom for which the Brahmo Samaj openly stood.

I forget the date, but it was sometime in the autumn of 1877, that we took our oath of initiation as members of this group. Shivanath was then employed as the senior Sanskrit teacher in the Hare School. He used to sleep in one of the rooms of the first floor of the school building. One night, or more accurately, in the small hours of one morning, we assembled in one of the rooms of the first floor of the Hare School for our initiation. The poet in Shivanath could not rise above the spectacular value of all sacraments. He could not ignore the place and importance of symbolism in all cults and cultures, however rational these be. Through these symbolisms religion universally appeals to our emotions and helps in the cultivation of the consciousness of the Unseen. So he did not hesitate, his uncompromising rationalism notwithstanding, to have recourse to an imitation of ancient Hindu ritualism in our initiation ceremony. We made a fairly big fire, collected some green banyan leaves, wrote on these leaves words indicating our different passions and appetites, such as lust, anger, envy, etc., as well as those which stood for the more glaring social evils about us like, for instance, caste, *zenana* seclusion and the meaningless ceremonialism of popular Hinduism. Dipping these in pure clarified butter we went round this fire, and chanting a hymn specially composed by Shivanath for this occasion, we threw these leaves into this fire, and then, after offering a fervent prayer to the Lord to lead us to our ideal, we signed this pledge. Shivanath, however, could not accept this initiation or sacrament on this day, because he was still in government service. He did so six months later. The original members of this group were (1) Babu Sarat Chandra Roy, (2) Babu Ananda Chandra Mitra, (3) Babu Kali Sankar Sukul, (4) Babu Tara Kishore Choudhury, (5) Babu Sundari Mohan Das, and (6) myself. In January 1878 three members were initiated, (1) Pandit Shivanath Shastri himself, who had in the meantime resigned from the service of the government, (2) Babu Umapada Roy, and (3) Babu Gagan Chandra Home. Babu Sarat Chandra Roy was a remarkable character. He had joined the Brahmo Samaj at Mymensingh where he was running a book and stationery shop. This shop was the centre of a powerful Brahmo propaganda among the youthful

students of the town, and it was the personal character of Babu Sarat Chandra that attracted these youthful reformers to the movement. The strangest thing about Babu Sarat Chandra was that he had never been to an English school, and even in Bengalee he was by no means a scholar. Not his intellect but his transparent honesty and deathless devotion to what appealed to him as true and good were the source of the strength and fascination of his personality. He was, with the possible exception of Pandit Shivanath Shastri, the oldest member of this new group. He has gone to his rest. But those who knew him can never forget the quiet strength and the persistent sweetness of his character. Babu Ananda Chandra Mitra was also much older than the majority of us. He had made his mark even when working, I think, as a school master at Mymensingh, as a Bengalee poet of great promise. He had joined the Brahmo Samaj at Mymensingh and at the time of his initiation he was living in Calcutta. If I mistake not, he had been almost a regular writer in Shivanath's monthly magazine, the *Samadarshee*. He too has passed on to the other side. Babu Kali Sankar Sukul was not a Bengalee by birth, though his father was a resident of Mymensingh where he carried on some flourishing business. He was by birth an up-country Brahmin. His native place, or more correctly, his family residence was in Unao in the district of Cawnpore. He was one of the most brilliant students of the Mymensingh Government School of his time, and passing the entrance examination from there with some distinction he came and joined the Presidency College in Calcutta in 1874. He had been slowly drawn to the Brahmo Samaj at Mymensingh mainly, I think, through the influence of Babu Sarat Chandra Roy. Coming to Calcutta, he openly joined the Brahmo movement throwing off his Brahminical thread. He came to our small group through the influence of his two old Mymensingh friends, Babus Sarat Chandra Roy and Ananda Chandra Mitra. He made his mark in the university also, and when Surendra Nath came and joined the Students' Association, Kali Sankar became a prominent member of it. When he joined this new organisation, he was studying for his degree. Passing his M.A. examination in '78 or '79, Kali Sankar joined the City College as a professor.

Subsequently, he left the City College to take full charge and complete financial responsibility of one of the branches of the City School in the northern part of the town. It was when running this School that death overtook him. He died young. Tara Kishore Choudhury's is a most remarkable personality. He belongs to my own native district of Sylhet. He came off a most respectable Brahmin family, whose traditional pride was that they never accepted any gift from a Sudra. He passed the entrance examination of the Calcutta University in the same year with me, and secured a scholarship of Rs. 15 from the new Assam Government. Coming to Calcutta, he joined the Metropolitan Institution. Here he soon came under the influence of Surendra Nath. Gradually he was drawn to the Brahmo Samaj also. Tara Kishore is so made that he can never do anything by half. When he felt drawn to the Brahmo Samaj, without a moment's hesitation he threw off his Brahminical thread and started to practise, regardless of all costs or consequences, everything that was considered right or good in the ideals and estimates of the Samaj. The same fidelity to what appealed to him as true that had drawn him to the Brahmo Samaj drove him a few years later back to the old Hindu orthodoxy. From an aggressive and radical Brahmo Tara Kishore became in later life a sincere Hindu, strictly following all the disciplines, physical, psycho-physical as well as social and ethical, enjoined upon every devout Brahmin by ancient Hindu law and scripture. Starting life as a school master he soon entered the profession of law, and after practising it for a few years in his native district of Sylhet he came to the Calcutta High Court and soon made a fairly good practice on the Appellate side of this court. Though his practice was not as large as that of some of his contemporaries in the Calcutta High Court, he was recognised as one of the very best lawyers in the profession, taking his place in the estimates of many of those who worked with him only next to that of Sir Rash Behary Ghosh. But financially he did not succeed as well as some other *vakeels* in the front rank of the profession. And the reason was that Tara Kishore never allowed his legal work to interfere in any way with the regular pursuit of his religious duties. Later in life he came in contact with one of

the most pious and renowned Vaishnava saints of our time, Kathia Baba, and became a disciple of his. From this time forward he consecrated all that he owned, his bodily energies, his thoughts and emotions, absolutely to the leading and service of his guru. Upon attaining the age of fifty, according to ancient Hindu ideals of life, Tara Kishore retired from all secular activities, giving up his practice at the Bar, and devoted himself entirely to the pursuit of the religious life. After the passing away of his guru, Tara Kishore went to Brindaban and took charge of the service in his guru's ashram. All his earthly savings were dedicated to this service. He built a magnificent temple here and himself became its custodian. His piety and devotion have been recognised by the Vaishnavic brotherhood of the whole of India, and they have conferred on him the rare distinction of the title 'Braja-videhi'. He is now known as Braja-videhi Baba Santadas.

In the very nature of things a large number of recruits could not be expected in a movement like this. The ideals of this small group were far in advance even of the progressive section of the Brahmo Samaj. Indeed, a prominent member of the Samaj had come to one of our initiatory services fully prepared to join us. But at the last moment he withdrew because he found it impossible for him to take the vow of not only not to marry himself before the age of twenty-one, but also not accepting as his spouse any girl below the age of sixteen, and particularly the obligation to discourage early marriage by refusing any manner of association with even Brahmo marriages, the ages of the parties wherein were below twenty-one for the bridegroom and sixteen for the bride. But other circumstances also soon intervened and prevented the growth of this movement. Chief among these was the marriage of Keshub Chunder Sen's daughter with the minor Maharaja of Cooch Behar and the schism in the Brahmo Samaj, to which it led. The establishment of the Sadharana Brahmo Samaj in the summer of 1878, within less than six months of Pandit Shivanath's acceptance of this initiation, opened up before him a large field of public usefulness as a minister and missionary of it. This completely absorbed all his time and energies and left him but little leisure to nurse the infant society which he had inspired and

practically created. Of this small band, Tara Kishore Choudhury had long separated himself from it, and two of us only, namely, Sundari Mohan Das and myself, are at present the only survivors. This small organisation had, however, a very large hand in shaping the whole course of my life. Though I have been slowly drifting towards the Brahmo Samaj, it was this organisation and the vow which I took in joining it that almost immediately forced me to openly cut myself off from the old Hindu orthodoxy, creating a permanent breach between my father and myself, and making me a member of that section of the Brahmo Samaj which tried to regulate the personal, the domestic and the social life of its members in accordance with the Brahmo ideals of rationalism and freedom, popularly known as *anusthanic* Brahmos.

Chapter 16

FATHER AND SON



Between 1875 and 1877, when I received my initiation through this small organisation into the Brahmo Samaj, I had been home to Sylhet twice, once during the summer of 1875, when I lost my mother, and again in the winter of 1876. My mother's death practically removed the bands that had tied my heart and my life to my family and home. And this very considerably made it easy for me to cut myself off from the old orthodox society which I was compelled to do by openly joining the Brahmo Samaj.

In the winter of 1876, that is, before my initiation into the little group organised under the leadership of Pandit Shivanath Shastri, I went once more to spend a few days with my father in Sylhet. I was, however, still within the Hindu communion, though I had no respect for the restrictions of Hindu orthodoxy in regard to eating and drinking. Even my father knew it, though he never asked me about it, and I made no confession to him of my lapses. My father knew that neither he nor anybody else could possibly prevent the inevitable dissolution of Hindu orthodoxy under the disintegrating influences of English education and the modern spirit which our people imbibed through it. I remember one evening during this, which was practically my last visit to our home in Sylhet, while I was sitting by him, a Brahmin guest of his came and complained to him how young boys of the neighbourhood showed no respect for his age or caste and freely washed their hand and mouth after their meals at the platform of the tank in our compound while this Brahmin was performing his daily devotions, and my father replying that these things could not be prevented. They were due to the omnipotent Time-Spirit, and pointing his finger towards me he said, "How can I interfere with other people's sons when I cannot control my own son in

regard to these matters. He is sitting there. Now, do you think that he starved all the way from Calcutta to Sylhet or lived on parched rice during his journey on board the steamer between Goalando and Sylhet? Knowing all this how can I chastise other people's sons for the slight offence which they have given you?" This frank confession silenced our Brahmin guest, and incidentally it revealed to me a new mentality and an unexpected spirit of toleration in my father.

But while he was evidently ready to tolerate the inevitable breach of Hindu orthodoxy in my personal habits of life, he was not willing to put up with any open revolt against the Hindu society, and when I challenged social authority and publicly commenced to disobey the restrictions of caste, my father was the first person to excommunicate me and gradually to disown and disinherit me for my apostacy. This happened in 1878, that is, after I had been initiated into the larger Brahmoism of Pandit Shivanath Shastri.

All through 1877, my father repeatedly urged me to go home during the summer, the Puja and the winter recesses. I did not like to cause an open breach with him. As long as I was in Calcutta, it mattered absolutely nothing to my father and my family whether I observed the rules of Hindu orthodoxy or not. But my new faith would be put to a practical test the moment I went home. So I avoided it. But my father was not left in ignorance of the new developments in my thought and life. He had come to know, though not directly from me, because he never asked me any unpleasant questions regarding my faith and life, but from fellow-students belonging to my district who were studying in Calcutta at the time, that I had joined the Brahmo Samaj, and was not likely to continue inside the Hindu fold. I was his only son. He had built up his earthly hopes on me. Though he rarely or never gave outer expression to his deep affection for me, he had, like Hindu parents of his generation, devoutly prayed for a son who would continue the line of his ancestors and by his learning, wealth, social distinction and character, add fresh glories to the family history. His affection for me was something religious, if not spiritual. To bring up sons was to the ideals of the generation

to which my father belonged a sacred religious obligation. It was discharging a debt which he owed to the unremembered line of his forbears, called in Sanskrit *pitri-reena* or the debt to the *pitris* or the manes. It was, to use modern phraseology, the obligation of the individual to help race preservation. But it was more. To produce progeny and then to bring them up in the ways and wisdom of the race was an equally sacred obligation imposed upon every householder. This was called *deva-reena* or the debt to the gods, which was discharged by the preservation of the ancient rituals of the race, and *rishi-reena* or debt to the *rishis*, who were the repositories of the intellectual illumination and the ethical and spiritual ideals of the race. This last debt was discharged by acquiring the inherited wisdom of the ancients and contributing to it by personal culture of the supreme wisdom. These were the debts under the burden of which every Hindu was born, and for the due discharge of which he entered the marital life and became a householder. My father was brought up in the ideals and traditions of this old Hindu social economy. Marriage and the rearing of issue, particularly of male issues, were thus part of the religion of the Hindu householder of the higher and educated classes of the generation to which my father belonged. This idealism formed really the foundation of a highly developed science of eugenics in our society. My father prayed for my coming. When I came, he accepted me as sacred gift from Heaven. He tended me in my infancy almost as if I were his God. When I grew up he no doubt chastised me sometimes very severely but he never lost sight of this ideal even in my upbringing in boyhood. He was consciously working to bring out the highest possibilities of my mind and body. He had also, quite naturally, his social ambitions. Years after, a few days previous to his passing away, he explained to me why he christened me as 'Bipin Chandra'. Bipin in Bengali and Sanskrit means a jungle or a wilderness; Chandra means the moon. Bipin Chandra means the moon of a jungle or a wilderness; and my father told me that his village was more or less of a wilderness in those days. It was an obscure place, unknown to the outer world, and he deeply desired that his son should illumine some day this wilderness and bring name

and fame to it. This is why he gave me this particular name. By joining the Brahmo Samaj, making myself thereby an outcaste from home and society, I had taken up by the roots those tender hopes and ambitions of my father. And it was in the desolation of his heart caused by my apostasy that he referred to the secret of his father-love in course of a chance conversation on this occasion. And I felt then the height and depth of the parental love which I had outraged by breaking away from my father and the old Hindu communion. This brought home to me that I was not the fruit of my father's sex-passion but was in his eyes a gift of the Gods, given in response to his profound religious and spiritual longing, what is called in Sanskrit *tapasya*. There is no word in the English language able to convey the significance of this Sanskrit word *tapasya*. People perform *tapasya* to win heaven; they perform *tapasya* to attain *moksha* or salvation, which is higher than heaven; others perform *tapasya* for the acquisition of wealth or earthly power. My father performed *tapasya* to have a son, and I was the fruit of that *tapasya*. I did not understand all this in my early youthful days. Looking back, however, upon those early experiences I am able to somewhat understand the lofty idealism that stood behind my father's restrained and chastened love of his ungrateful and unworthy son.

I was not directly initiated into the Brahmo Samaj. But by joining the small group organised by Pandit Shivanath Shastri I was forced to cut myself off from the orthodox Hindu communion. I would never have done this at the call of any sectarian religion or theology. It was the fuller ideal of freedom of our small group that led me to repudiate ancient caste and customs. After my initiation into this small group, it became absolutely impossible for me to go home. That would inevitably hasten the crisis between my father and myself. He had built up great hopes on me. He had thought that I would maintain, even if I could not improve, the old family status. He had felt the handicap under which he worked in his profession owing to his ignorance of English, which was rapidly replacing Persian as court language in Bengal, and that was one of the strongest reasons which weighed with him in giving me an English education. In sending me to the university

after I had passed the entrance examination, my father eagerly looked forward to the day when I would take my law degree and go to Sylhet and succeed him in the high position which, notwithstanding his ignorance of English, he had secured at the bar. But all these hopes were shattered by me. When rumours of my apostacy reached him, the first action that he took was to stop supply. He did it in the hope that I might be forced thereby to go home. But I did not. I continued to struggle in Calcutta. The next step that he took was to marry again at the age of sixty-four. He had placed on me his hopes of carrying on the family tradition. I was his only son. Like myself he also had been his father's only son. He had no brothers, and no nephews who could fill up my place in the family scheme. And it was this which drove him to marriage at this advanced age. For about six months he sent me no remittance. But immediately after his marriage, he sent me in a lump all the arrears of this half a year. In doing so, he wrote to me a long letter the contents of which I have not forgotten in course of the last fifty years and which I shall never forget as long as memory lives. I did not preserve it. But I am able to reproduce it even after this long lapse of time almost word for word. The very form of the address was remarkable. He addressed me not as *kalyanabaresu*, meaning the object or recipient of the highest blessings or good, but *pranatulyesu* which meant 'the very life of my life'. This was really not the usual form of address from father to son even in those days, and it showed the peculiar tenderness with which my father cherished me. In our ancient books it is said that the father is re-born in the son. It is the self or life of the father which is born as the son. The address, which my father adopted in this letter though not common, was, therefore, in absolute consonance with the ancient ideal of the relation between father and son. If I remember aright, I think my father had never before addressed me in these terms, and that he should have done so on this occasion, proved the deep wound which I had inflicted in the tenderest part of his self by this open repudiation of almost everything that he held not only of supreme social but also of very great spiritual value. In this letter, he gave a brief resume of his life in relation to me. He

first referred to the high hopes that he had placed on me and my future, and now that those hopes had been dashed to the ground, he recounted one by one what he described as the greatest mistakes of his life. He wrote: "My first mistake was to send you to an English school. My second mistake was to resign from the judicial service with a view to find facilities for your English education. Had I continued in that service, I would have, like my contemporaries in the service, retired from the position of a subordinate judge today with a pension of Rs. 500 per month. My third mistake was to send you to Calcutta after you passed the entrance examination; and I have committed a fourth blunder by marrying at this age. But I hope that by this marriage I have created unexpected opportunities for the pursuit of your religion, so that you may, like Durga Mohan Das, have the satisfaction of giving your own widowed step-mother in marriage." I wish I could reproduce in the original that letter, so full of pathos, so subtle in its irony and its pathetic humour, for even in this unspeakable anguish of his soul my father could not overcome his inborn sense of humour. The whole letter laid bare his wounded soul. He had stopped my remittances in the hope of forcing me to go home to him, but when I quietly ignored this, evidently in a fit of anger he married at that age. When that fit passed away, he realised the wrong that he had done to me, and as some little reparation for it he sent me the accumulated arrears of my monthly remittance. This was the last letter that I had from my father. With this letter he shut his door against me. But it was not yet barred and bolted. That came later on.

Chapter 17

THE SADHARANA BRAHMO SAMAJ



With the establishment of the Sadharana Brahmo Samaj in 1878 my association with the movement of religious and social revolt became increasingly intimate. In fact, though I had been attending the Sunday services of the Brahmo Samaj of India, led by Keshub Chunder Sen, I was all along practically a mere 'worshipper at the gate' in that temple. I never came in personal contact with the minister. I was not personally acquainted with any of his missionaries either, with the solitary exception of Bhai Amrita Lal Bose, who was the superintendent or the missionary-in-charge of the Brahmo Niketan, the Brahmo students' mess located in 13 Mirzapore Street, or was it 12? Babu Sitanath Datta, who came from my native district of Sylhet, and his cousin Babu Srinath Datta were inmates of this Niketan; and through them I gradually came to know Babu Amrita Lal Bose. When we started a prayer meeting in our mess in 1876, Amrita Babu used sometimes to come and lead us in our devotions. This was practically my only association with the leaders of the Brahmo Samaj of India.

When in March 1878 a storm broke upon the Brahmo Samaj of India over the marriage of the eldest daughter of Keshub Chunder Sen with the minor Maharaja of Cooch Behar, I was drawn into this protest movement. Both the bride and the bridegroom were below the minimum marriageable age fixed by Act III of 1872, which had been passed at the special desire of Keshub Chunder Sen and his following of progressive Brahmos. Keshub had indeed asked for a special Act to legalise the marriages of the members of the new reformed church or community. They had broken away from the old and orthodox

Hindu community by discarding both caste and image-worship. They had removed from their own community the ban on the re-marriage of widows. They had commenced to contract inter-caste marriages and encourage widow marriages. These marriages were performed without the presence of the Hindu symbol *Salagram*, as witness, and without the Brahmin as the presiding priest. The first widow and inter-caste marriage in Calcutta under the auspices of the Brahmo Samaj created such a tremendous sensation in the local Hindu community that the bridegroom's party had to proceed to the bride's house under police protection. These marriages could not claim to be Hindu marriages. They were of doubtful validity under the Hindu law, which had no sanction for inter-caste marriages, particularly between a bride of a higher caste and a bridegroom of a lower caste. Faced with these difficulties the small band of advanced social and religious reformers belonging to the new Brahmo Samaj of India wanted through their leader a special law for legalising these marriages. Lord Northbrook was then the Viceroy. Sir Henry Sumner Maine was the Law Member in the Government of India, and both the Viceroy and his legal adviser recognising the justice and necessity of a special law for the Brahmos proposed to pass a Brahmo marriage law. This was stoutly opposed; not only by the orthodox Hindu community, as offering official encouragement to the disrupting forces in the Hindu society, but also by the older section of conservative Brahmos themselves belonging to the congregation of Maharshi Devendra Nath. The Maharshi had eschewed all forms of idolatry in the marriages of the members of his own family. No *Salagram* was brought as witness in these marriages. The ritual was unobjectionable from even the Brahmo point of view; and the objection of his wing of the Brahmo Samaj to the proposed marriage law was that if such a law was passed, it would by implication invalidate all the marriages contracted and celebrated by the members of the Adi Samaj, and more particularly in the family of Maharshi Devendra Nath himself. In the face of this dual opposition to a special Brahmo Marriage Act from Brahmos and Hindus alike the government was forced to drop the original bill. All that they could do to meet the situation

was to enact a special Civil Marriage Act for India that might be availed of by all people who did not follow the Hindu, the Christian, the Buddhist, the Moslem and other established religions. This was Act III of 1872, and though not called a Brahmo Marriage Act, the advanced section of the Brahmo Samaj under the leadership of Keshub Chunder Sen practically accepted it as their own marriage law. This Act placed certain restrictions upon the civil marriages that might be contracted in accordance with its provisions. The first was that no marriage should be performed until the bridegroom had completed his eighteenth year and the bride her fourteenth year of age. This was the minimum marriageable age fixed by this Act. But in marriages between parties, particularly of a girl of this minimum age, the consent of her parent or guardian was absolutely necessary for its legalisation. When a bride attained the age of twenty-one the sanction of her parent or guardian might be dispensed with. In the case of a widow, however, who was believed to be without any legal guardian, she was free to marry whomsoever she liked even without the consent of her parents or other relations, provided she was above the age of fourteen. Another provision of this Act was that at the time of their marriage parties uniting in lawful wedlock under this law must be either maidens, spinsters or bachelors or widows and widowers. The marriage of the eldest daughter of Keshub Chunder Sen with the minor Maharaja of Cooch Behar violated the provisions of this Act in regard to the age of the parties. Keshub Chunder Sen's daughter was below fourteen and the Maharaja of Cooch Behar had not as yet attained his majority. This was the first and initial objection to this marriage. Keshub, however, waived it, possibly in consideration of the help that the acceptance of the Brahmo Samaj as the state religion in a Hindu principality would bring to his movement. And it would not be unfair to imagine that in giving his sanction to this marriage Keshub interpreted it only as a formal betrothal. The Maharaja of Cooch Behar was going to England to finish his studies. His guardians naturally wanted that to prevent future complications he should be married before he left for England. The same motive might have possibly influenced Keshub in looking upon this

marriage only as a betrothal and nothing more, the actual nuptial being left to be celebrated when the parties came of age. It must have been in this view that Keshub accepted this proposal of the Maharaja's party. They assured him that so far as the ritual was concerned, it would be in complete consonance with the principles of the Brahmo Samaj. When, however, Keshub arrived at the head of the bride's party at Cooch Behar, the authorities discovered that for the legality of the minor Maharaja's marriage the ancestral custom of the Raj must be followed. It meant the observance of all the details of the orthodox Hindu marriage ceremony, including the installation of the symbol *Salagram* as witness of it, and also the due observance of the rules of caste. By his visit to England Keshub had openly and definitely put himself out of caste; he could not, therefore, give his daughter away himself; his younger brother Krishna Behari Sen could, however, be regarded as being in caste and he would have to act for his elder brother in the marriage ritual. These surprises were sprung upon Keshub in open violation of the assurances given to him by the Maharaja's representatives in Calcutta. And Keshub found himself helpless, as he believed, to oppose the wishes and the machinations of the Maharaja's guardians. The marriage was thus not only a violation of Act III of 1872, but it was equally an outrage against the very fundamental-principles of the progressive section of Brahmo Samaj of which Keshub was the universally acclaimed leader. Naturally enough, it provoked almost universal protest from his following all over the country. At first, even his intimate missionaries felt sorely grieved by these happenings. As soon as settlement of the marriage was announced, prominent members of the Brahmo community submitted a written protest against it to the minister. But it was not even courteously acknowledged, and Keshub with the bridal party left for Cooch Behar with such pomp and circumstance as the marriage of a prince naturally called for. The indignation in the Brahmo Samaj deepened and expanded at this open disregard of the sanctities and sentiments of the Brahmo Samaj by its accredited leader. When the report of the manner in which the marriage was performed became public, this indignation developed into a wild

storm of protests against the action of the minister. Public meetings were held in Calcutta and the *mufassil* to give organised expression to the sentiments of the Brahmo community in regard to this matter.

A meeting of youthful students of Calcutta was held in the premises now known as 13 Cornwallis Street, which stands opposite the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, which at that time was the location of a high English school, called the Training Academy. I was charged with the duty of seconding the resolution of protest against the Cooch Behar marriage, which, if I remember aright, was moved by Babu Sitanath Datta, better known now as Pandit Sitanath Tattvabhusan. We adopted the following letter of protest at this meeting.

To the Very Reverend Babu Keshub Chunder Sen.

Most Reverend Sir,—We, the undersigned Brahmo students of Calcutta, have heard, with deep despair, the news of the intended marriage of your daughter with His Highness the Maharaja of Cooch Behar, a Prince not yet in his sixteenth year, while your daughter has passed thirteenth year only. We need hardly say that the consequences of such a step, if taken by you, would be disastrous on the minds of the rising generation of Brahmos. It was principally through your exertions that Act III of 1872 was passed, and a higher platform gained with respect to marriageable age; but such conduct in you would inevitably neutralise the effects of that law, and lead many weak minds amongst us to fall early victims to the increased importunities of guardians and friends. Secondly, such a step will seriously compromise the character as a leader of social reform attained by our Church “through so many years of struggle and self-sacrifice.

Thirdly, the fact of giving your daughter in marriage to a person who was never known before to be a Brahmo would lead youngmen to attach secondary importance to considerations of religious faith in matters of matrimony.

Under these circumstances, we beg to entreat you, Most Reverend Sir, to take into consideration the grave nature of the step you are about to take.

This protest was signed, among others, by Babu Krishna Kumar Mitra and Sitanath Datta. This was my first public association with the Brahmo Samaj. Ours was only one of a very large number of protests submitted to Keshub, personally or by letter or by wire, beseeching him to withdraw from an arrangement that was directly opposed to the accepted principle in regard to the minimum marriageable age of boys and girls belonging to the Brahmo Samaj. Though the protesters represented practically the entire body of the elders of the Brahmo Samaj, their protests were treated with scant courtesy if not indeed with open and insulting defiance. The marriage was gone through in the way already noted, and Keshub's practical submission to the idolatrous ceremonies forced upon him by the authorities at Cooch Behar roused profound pity and universal indignation in the Samaj and lowered it very seriously in the estimation of the educated community of India, who, whether they entirely accepted the doctrines of the Brahmo Samaj or not, looked upon it as a great moral power and an effective instrument for the social emancipation and uplift of the Indian and particularly the Hindu community. At the requisition of the protesters in Calcutta a special meeting of the Congregation of the Brahmo Samaj of India was held to consider the conduct of its minister in regard to the marriage of his eldest daughter. I was present at this meeting in the belief that as a regular attendant at the Sunday Services in the *mandir* I was also a member of the congregation, though I never paid any subscription and did not even know that payment of such subscription was at all a condition of membership of the Congregation. Indeed, as it came out in course of this controversy, the Calcutta Congregation, of which Keshub was the chief minister, had hardly any well-defined constitution of its own. There was, it seems, some kind of a register of membership, but this register was filled up and kept by one of the missionaries, and the congregation was never consulted in enrolling members. Keshub was the president of the congregation and the Rev. Pratap Chandra Majoomdar was its secretary. The meeting was divided into two camps, in one of which stood the personal friends of the minister, most of whom belonged to the missionary body of the

Samaj; on the other, were ranged practically the entire body of the laity. As Keshub's conduct in regard to his daughter's marriage was the subject of consideration before this special meeting, Babu Durga Mohan Das, one of the leading protesters, was proposed to the chair. But it was opposed by the missionary group, and Keshub himself, in virtue of his office as permanent president, took the chair. This led to great confusion. A division was called for to decide as to the opinion of the meeting on the question of its president. The motion that Babu Durga Mohan Das should take the chair was carried in this division by an overwhelming majority of those present. At this Keshub with his missionary following and the few friends who stood by him among the laity left the meeting, which carried unanimously a resolution condemning the action of the minister and calling for his resignation. This was only the beginning of the fight. Keshub and his friends denied the validity of this meeting and refused to accept its decision as constitutionally binding on them. Then followed a most unseemly struggle for the occupation of the Prayer Hall from which, however, the protesters were kept out by force and intrigue. The organisation of a separate congregation thus became inevitable. Driven from the old *mandir* the protesters started their weekly prayer meetings in a private house, a couple of doors removed from their old place of worship. A provisional committee, called the Brahmo Samaj Committee, was formed with Mr. Ananda Mohan Bose as President, to take such steps in consultation with the *mufassil* congregations as might be deemed necessary and desirable for the protection of the purity of the Samaj and to secure a prayer hall of its own. This committee convened a general meeting of Brahmos in the Town Hall of Calcutta and at this meeting was formally established the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj in May 1878. I became a member of it and threw myself into such activities of the Samaj, mainly literary, as were open to me. In August 1878, the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj celebrated its first *utsava* or spiritual festival in commemoration of the establishment of the original Samaj by Raja Ram Mohan Roy and at this *utsava* some of us among the younger members of the Samaj were asked to read suitable essays. Sundari Mohan

read one and I also read a paper on fidelity to truth in the face of severe trials and persecutions, drawing my inspirations mainly from Fox's book of *Christian Martyrs*. The new Brahmo Samaj had started upon a militant propaganda as much against Hindu orthodoxy as against the organised autocracy of the Brahmo minister.

This autocracy had grown in the Brahmo Samaj of India mainly, if not entirely, owing to the lack of regular democratic constitution of that body. Those who broke away from Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore because they could not stand autocracy failed however themselves to provide against this evil in their new Samaj by giving it a regular constitution and seeing to it that this constitution was maintained in full vigour. The young men who broke away from Devendra Nath were fired with an enthusiasm for truth. They stood up for their conscience and devoted themselves almost exclusively to the building up of their personal character and piety in consonance with the dictates of their reason and their conscience. And in this work of character-building Keshub had naturally been their guide, philosopher and friend. Keshub was endowed with very considerable personal magnetism, and this drew to him the entire body of youthful reformers and kept them with him by weaving around them silken bands of personal affection and regard. The very idea that Keshub might, at any time, fall away from the lofty idealism of the movement which owed so much of its initiation, strength and inspiration to his personal character and culture was dismissed immediately it rose in the minds of his following, if it did rise at all, and in the preoccupation of their ethical and religious exercises the question of giving a regular constitution to the new Samaj never received the serious attention of its members. This was neglected to such an extent that though the prayer hall in Mechua Bazar Street was built by public subscription, nobody cared to have a trust-deed of this property drafted and registered. The title-deed of the land on which the prayer hall was built remained in the name of Keshub. All this came out in course of this struggle for occupation of the *mandir* by the protesters. The first concern of the new Samaj was therefore to prepare a regular constitution

of its own. Ananda Mohan was entrusted with this duty along with a few members of the new Samaj of whom Shivanath Shastri was one. In drawing up the constitution of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj Ananda Mohan was moved by a much larger ideal than that of building up a religious congregation only. We, young men belonging to the small group led by Shivanath Shastri, had already caught the larger inspiration of freedom, personal, social as well as political. We had commenced to dream dreams of the future of our country which would realise as much in the personal purity and character of its children as in their social life and institutions and in the organisation of their state and the constitution of their government, the largest and highest ideal of freedom that moved us. In this we stood more or less apart from the older members even of the new Brahmo Samaj. Ananda Mohan, though not openly identified with us, had yet seen this larger vision of national freedom and sovereignty, and in drafting a constitution for the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj he was moved by this larger vision and wanted to give to this new Brahmo Samaj a constitution that would some day furnish a model for the constitution of the future National State of India. Once bit twice shy—practically guided the framers of this constitution. The makers of this constitution for the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj carefully devised checks and counter-checks to prevent the growth of any manner of autocracy in this Samaj. The central idea of the makers of this constitution was to prevent the development of any manner of leadership of any individual, howsoever endowed he might be, in the control and direction of its affairs. This was, no doubt, necessary at that time; but every good has its counterpoise of evil, and while this new constitution maintained to the fullest extent the democratic character of the Samaj, it certainly stood in the way of the development of that large spiritual personality in the guidance and education of the congregation, which is so essential for the preservation and development of a religious body.

The new Brahmo Samaj, immediately after its establishment, applied itself to the organisation of its mission work. Of the older missionaries of the Brahmo Samaj of India, only one, Pandit Bijay Krishna Goswami, left Keshub and joined the protestant

organisation, and he was among the very first to be accepted as a missionary of the new Samaj. Pandit Shivanath Shastri, who had already resigned from public service (at the beginning of the year 1878) was also ordained as a missionary of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. Pandit Ram Kumar Vidyaratna, who had been associated with Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore in the Adi Brahmo Samaj, joined the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj almost as soon as it was organised, and was ordained as one of its missionaries. Babu Ganesh Chandra Ghosh had been working as an official in the postal service in Bengal; he felt the call of the new Samaj, and retired from his service with a view to devote himself exclusively to its mission work. Babu Nagendra Nath Chatterjee, who had been wanting to consecrate his life to the mission work of the Brahmo Samaj before the Cooch Behar marriage, but whose spirit of freedom and liberal social ideas did not find favour with Keshub's missionary brotherhood, became, on the establishment of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, one of its most popular and powerful propagandists and was soon ordained as a missionary.

From the beginning of this struggle, the leaders of the protest movement keenly felt the want of an organ of their own in the public press. Keshub Chunder had his English organ, the *Indian Mirror*, and the Bengalee organ of the Brahmo Samaj of India, entirely controlled by his missionaries, was a fortnightly, the *Dharmatattwa*; while he had also a Bengalee weekly (the first Bengalee pice paper), the *Sulabh Samachar*. And all these organs of his commenced to try to prejudice public opinion against his opponents. The new Samaj had therefore to start first an English organ of its own, called the *Brahmo Public Opinion*. Indeed, it was already started with the beginning of the protest and before the establishment of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. It was financed by Babu Durga Mohan Das and Mr. Ananda Mohan Bose. Babu Bhuban Mohan Das, an attorney of the Calcutta High Court, Durga Mohan's younger brother, was placed in editorial charge of it. Immediately after the establishment of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, a Bengalee fortnightly organ of it was started under the name of the *Tattwa-Kaumudee*. This name was selected by

combining the title of the first organ of the new movement under Raja Ram Mohan Roy, which he called *Kaumudee*, and the name of the organ of the revived Brahmo Samaj under Devendra Nath Tagore, which he called *Tattawa-Bodhinee*. The *Brahmo Public Opinion* was subsequently set free from direct association with the Samaj in 1883, when the *Indian Messenger* was started by the Samaj itself as its own organ, and the *Brahmo Public Opinion* became a general weekly newspaper and review under the name of the *Bengal Public Opinion*. Babu Durga Mohan Das and his younger brother Bhuban Mohan took up the entire financial responsibility of the new undertaking. The *Bengal Public Opinion* lived an independent existence for two years, and in the third year it was merged in or incorporated with the *Bengalee* (weekly), which had passed a few years previously into the hands of Surendra Nath Banerjee. It was in this paper, the *Bengal Public Opinion*, that I served my regular apprenticeship in English journalism.

There was one other Bengalee weekly, the *Bharat Samskarak*, which though not directly owned by the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj identified itself with the protestant Brahmos. It had originally been started as the organ of the Indian Social Reform Association, which was established by Keshub upon his return from England in 1872. Babu Umesh Chandra Datta was placed in charge of it. About 1878 when the schism in the Brahmo Samaj took place the *Bharat Samskaraka* was jointly owned and edited by Babus Kalinath Datta and Umesh Chandra Datta. After the establishment of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, I had the honour and the privilege of being invited to join the staff of this paper as an honorary contributor by the editors, and this was my first regular apprenticeship in Bengalee journalism.

The new Samaj was in need of workers. The regular missionaries were few, and these few could hardly cope with requirements of the very large field extending over the whole of Bengal, including Behar and Orissa and Assam, that cried for the new light. Young men who had just passed out of college or were preparing to pass out of it had to be trained for this work. They had also to be provided for not only during their period of probation and training but also after they joined as whole-time

workers. The mission fund of the Samaj was too poor to find all this money. Other sources of income had therefore to be created. High education had already become the crying need of the province. The new education policy of the Government of Bengal initiated by Sir George Campbell wanted, on the other hand, to check the spread of this costly high education, and divert the public funds thus set free to the education of the masses. This new policy of the government drove increasing numbers of our educated people to start private educational institutions to counter this mischievous move on the part of the government. The experiment of this private educational movement promised, almost from the very beginning, a large measure of financial self-sufficiency, if not success. The authorities of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj recognised here an excellent way out of the difficult problem which faced them for training their workers and maintaining them. With this object the City School was opened at the beginning of 1879 or towards the end of 1878. Babu Umesh Chandra Datta, who had already secured very considerable distinction as headmaster first at Harinabhi, a village to the south of Calcutta, and next at Konnagar, a small town next to Serampore on the East Indian Railway, was invited to take charge as headmaster of this school. Pandit Shivanath Shastri had also won high distinction as a successful headmaster in the southern suburb of Calcutta, from which position he had been drafted into the Education Service of the government and appointed as head Sanskrit teacher in the Hare School. After his ordination as missionary of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, Shivanath would not tie himself up with any regular office in the new school, but he became its first secretary and Ananda Mohan became its president. The school was started in 13, Mirzapore Street with a small sum advanced by Ananda Mohan Bose to meet initial expenses. But from the very first month it proved a financial success, and the money advanced by Mr Bose for its furniture was returned to him at the close of the first month. Babu Kali Sankar Sukul joined the City School as assistant teacher. From the very first this school was staffed by a number of highly qualified and experienced teachers.

I knew, as already mentioned, that I could not expect any help from my father now that I had openly and definitely cut myself away from the parent society and thereby outraged his tenderest affections and loyalties. So I was looking out for some employment by which I might find my own bread and devote myself to the work to which I had pledged my life by joining the small group formed by Pandit Shivanath, and I was eagerly looking forward to find an humble place in the City School staff. But, for one thing, I had little or no university qualification, having failed to pass the F.A. examination for the second time in 1878, and for another, I had received my school education in far away Sylhet, and the authorities of the City School found it impossible to trust me to keep order and discipline over metropolitan school boys. In those days young men coming to Calcutta from Eastern Bengal were the butt of ridicule of the Calcutta boys and young men. And for fear lest I should betray by provincial intonations my Eastern Bengal nativity, and thus fail to command the respect and confidence of the young boys in this new institution, my application for a place in it had to be turned down. It proved, however, though I was sorely disappointed at first, a real blessing to me in disguise. If I had been taken into this school, I would have to be placed at the lowest rung of the ladder; and looking back upon that disappointment I recognised in the course of a year or two how my whole life would have been cramped by being placed in the lower grade of the teaching staff of the City School from which, owing to absence of any high university qualification, it would take me a long life time to get into any responsible position in the teaching staff. As it was, when my application for a very junior teachership in the City School did not meet with success, Providence, to my surprise, opened before me the very responsible post of headmaster in an entrance school at Cuttack. It came in this way. A Brahmo friend, Babu Jadumani Ghosh, who had joined Keshub in the hope of being ordained as a missionary and had trustfully placed all his capital unreservedly in the hands of the mission committee—it counted in five figures or about Rs. 20,000, a very large sum in those days—joined the Cooch Behar protest and came out of the mission home of the

Brahmo Samaj of India: he was asked by the authorities of this high school in Cuttack to find some Brahmo young man to take charge of it on a more or less subsistence allowance. Jadumani Babu had great confidence in me. Though I had failed to pass the intermediate or F.A. examination, Jadumani Babu believed that my knowledge of English was quite sufficient to enable me to take charge as headmaster of this school. So he offered me this place. He also wanted a second and a third master for this school. As the headmaster would be in charge of English language and literature, so the second master would have to teach mathematics and the third master history and geography. These two places were offered by him to two of my friends, who also had like me got plucked in the F.A. examination. One was Babu Brajendra Nath Sen, who came from the district of Dacca; the other was Babu Raj Chandra Choudhury, who came from my own district of Sylhet. Brajendra became second master in charge of mathematics, and Raj Chandra the third master of this High English School at Cuttack.

We three, who had been thrown adrift by their families for joining the Brahmo Samaj, left together for our new field of work at the beginning of 1879. I was to get Rs. 30 a month and free quarters, and I think my two companions were promised either the same pay or just a little less than what I was to get.

Chapter 18

ORISSA FIFTY YEARS AGO



At the beginning of 1879 I thus found myself at Cuttack. Orissa had not as yet been connected with Bengal by rail. People had, during my boyhood and early youth, to walk all the way from Bengal to Puri along the old pilgrim-way mentioned in sixteenth century Bengalee literature. In the seventies of the last century steamer communication had however been opened between Calcutta and the port of Chandbali in Orissa. My first trip to Cuttack was made on board the ill-fated s.s. 'Sir John Lawrence', which was lost a few years later in the Bay of Bengal while making its weekly trip from Calcutta to Chandbali. It was a rickety old thing, hardly seaworthy, and no one who had any experience of it had any cause for surprise when it went down with a full complement of passengers during the pilgrim-season and not a sign could be traced of either its men or its materials. That was my first experience of the sea, and though it was winter time and the sea stood calm and placid almost like a lake, I did not entirely escape the discomforts of crossing the black water. We left Calcutta early in the morning and reached Sagar, the mouth of the Ganges, at about sunset. It took us about six hours to cross from here to Chandbali, which stands at the mouth of the delta of the Mahanadi. From Chandbali passengers, who cared to travel by boat, could do so by getting on board a canal steamer.

This steamer had no first or second class accommodation, which was supplied in green boats towed by it. I took a second class ticket from Chandbali to Cuttack and found myself in one of the green boats, the sole occupier of a two-berth cabin. The kitchen, presided over by a Madras cook, was next to my cabin, and for want of better occupation I opened the window between my cabin and the kitchen and commenced to take my lessons

silently in Madras cookery. Cooking was a hobby of my father's, who used, whenever he found leisure to do so, to cook many delicacies himself for our family breakfast or dinner. I must have inherited my father's passion for cooking, and the opportunities of learning the art offered by the boat that took me to Cuttack brought out my latent love of cooking and laid the foundations of my not altogether negligible proficiency in this art. Throughout my long life I have always tried to prepare something myself for friends whom we invite to breakfast or dinner to our house.

It took, so far as I remember, about twenty-four hours to reach Cuttack from Chandbali by these canal boats. This canal was the legacy left by the terrible Orissa famine. At one end of this canal, there is the Bahmani, one of the branches of the Mahanadi, and the Baitarane, while at the other end, below Cuttack, there is the Mahanadi itself. This canal not only found convenient river transport in these parts of Orissa but was also of very great help to the irrigation of these parts. There was an anicut on the Mahanadi near Cuttack which helped to store up the waters of this great river when it overflowed during the monsoon. The canal drew its supply from this storage.

Cuttack stands at the junction of the Mahanadi and its tributary, the Katjuari. The Mahanadi flows by the north of the town, while the Katjuari branching off from it at a distance, I fancy, of four or five miles from the western boundary of the town, flows along its southern limit. The Katjuari, though more or less a dry sand-bed during the greater part of the year, is, however, subject to wild fits of turbulence during the rains, and is therefore almost a perpetual danger to the town during these floods. From before the occupation by the British, Cuttack had tried to protect itself against the outbreak of the Katjuari by an embankment, the engineering skill and masonry of which challenged, when I first went to Cuttack, all the skill and resources of the British P.W.D. This embankment appealed to our young pride of race as a remarkable achievement of indigenous engineering. Was it Moslem or was it Hindu, we never asked, though Cuttack had been a chief town of Orissa under Hindu

rule also. It was sufficient to our youthful patriotism that this achievement was Indian, and not British.

When I first went to Cuttack fifty years ago, neither the classes nor the masses there had developed any separatist provincial consciousness. Orissa formed then a part of the Bengal Administration. The Administration of Bengal was composed of the three provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Bihar, though inside the administrative province of Bengal, had a distinct linguistic and cultural individuality of its own. But for more than five hundred years past a process of inter-provincial fusion had been at work between Orissa and Bengal. During the lifetime of Shree Chaitanya, the *Avatar* of Nadeeya and the founder of the Bengal School of Vaishnavism, Puri and Nadeeya were regarded, as Chaitanya's mother put it in her homely way, as "this house and that house" inside the same homestead. There was in those days an almost constant flow of pilgrims from Bengal to Orissa. This helped to spread the culture and with it also the literature of Bengal among the Oriyas, and bring back to Bengal in return valuable elements of Oriya culture and literature. The movement of Shree Chaitanya exerted perhaps deeper and wider influence among the people of Orissa than even among the Bengalees themselves. The element of protest against Brahminical caste and ritualism of Shree Chaitanya's movement was soon overwhelmed by the influence of the Bengal Brahmins who captured, even during the lifetime of Shree Chaitanya, the leadership of the movement. There are ample evidences of it all through in the sacred literature of Bengal Vaishnavism created or collated within a very few years of the ascension of its originator. Brahminical influence is unmistakable in 'Shree Chaitanya-Charitamrita,' the universally accepted Bible of the Bengal Vaishnavas. The most powerful cultural influences in the new cult were the two brothers, Rupa and Sanatana, and their nephew Jeeva, who developed the new philosophy and art of Bengal Vaishnavism, inspired by the life and experiences of its great founder, Shree Chaitanya Mahaprabhu; and both Rupa and Sanatana repeatedly confessed to their low origin and untouchable caste. This is interpreted by later Brahminical apologists not as

something which was literally true but as the expression of the Vaishnavic spirit of humility, and as a confession of the degradation to which these fathers of the new Vaishnavic Church subjected themselves by taking service under and accepting the wages of the Moslem rulers of Gauda. They fell off from their Brahminical sanctity through association with the *mlechhas*. Whether these two brothers and their nephew Jeeva were really Brahmins or not seems to be doubtful, though all the Vaishnava writers have made strenuous efforts to prove that they were really Brahmins. In any case, if Brahmins at all, they must have been Brahmins who had fallen off from Brahminical purity and relegated to the level of the untouchables in Hindu society like *peerali* Brahmins of our own day. While we find this attempt to Brahminise the non-Brahmins in Bengal Vaishnavism, in Orissa we find the contrary process of non-Brahminisation, so far as this could be, of the Brahmins themselves. In Orissa there are the holiest of holy Brahmins, the priests of the temple of Jagannath, whose family title is *Dasa*. *Dasa* is the title of the non-Brahmins; literally it means a servant or a slave. And that the Vaishnava Brahmins of Orissa should have adopted this surname or title seems to my mind to be an incontrovertible evidence of the greater hold of the followers of Shree Chaitanya in Orissa on the divine democracy which he promulgated than in Bengal.

What the Lutheran movement did in the history of the Christian Church, that was done by the movement of Shree Chaitanya in the evolution of Hinduism in Bengal. All the religious books of the Hindus were written in Sanskrit, starting with the *Vedas* and ending with the *Puranas*. All the sacred *mantrams* or texts used in worship and the cultivation of the spiritual life were in Sanskrit, and even these Sanskrit texts were not easy of comprehension. The ancient formula of Brahminical worship, the *Gayatree* taken from the *Vedas*, universally used by the Brahmins all over India, was hardly understood by the multitude who mechanically repeated it three times a day. Shree Chaitanya however offered a simple substitute for this difficult and ununderstood formula. The repetition of the name of the Lord, he declared, was more than enough to acquire the knowledge

and the love of the Deity. All or almost all the literature of the Chaitanya religion were composed in the current vernacular of the province, and this found a new incentive to the large and growing congregation of Vaishnavas to acquire sufficient knowledge of their own vernacular to be able to read their holy books, as this was enjoined as part of their daily devotional exercises. The immediate result of it was a remarkable spread of literacy among the Vaishnavas of Bengal. Vaishnavism in Bengal had from the time of Shree Chaitanya himself been divided into two camps; in one camp stood the followers of the Mahaprabhu belonging to so-called higher castes who, while accepting his religious and spiritual message, quietly ignored the great message of social democracy which he delivered to them and who therefore while they even worshipped him as the very God of Gods, continued still to follow in their domestic and social life and disciplines, the law of Manu and other Brahminical law-givers. They were known as Vaishnavas who still stuck to the *Smritis*. Side by side with these there was another class of Vaishnavas, who not only accepted the religious and spiritual teachings of the Master, but also loyally followed the social law of freedom and equality inculcated by him. These were known as 'caste Vaishnavas', who stood practically outside the hierarchy of Hindu castes and were therefore relegated by the Brahmins to a lower and almost untouchable social grade. I do not know if the Vaishnavas of Orissa practically adopted the social code of Shree Chaitanya and whether there exists among the Oriyas a section of Vaishnavas corresponding to the 'caste Vaishnavas' of Bengal. But whether the ideal of social democracy of the movement of Shree Chaitanya was practically adopted by his followers in Orissa or not, the moral influence of it is still seen in the repudiation of all Brahminical titles and family names by them, such as we do not find in Bengal. The only attempt made in this direction by the Bengalee followers of Shree Chaitanya was not towards social democratisation but on the contrary rather towards social aristocratisation. Every Vaishnavic teacher, to whatever caste, Brahminical or non-Brahminical, he might belong, became a *Goswami* or 'lord of the earth'. Even the so-called untouchables,

not to mention of mere non-Brahmins, thus became Gosains or Goswamis in Bengal; while in Orissa the highest Brahmins abandoned their Brahminical patronymic or surname and styled themselves as *Dasa*, which was the general title of the Sudras. This to my mind conclusively proved the stronger and deeper hold that the Chaitanya movement had upon the people of Orissa than even upon the people of his own native province.

It helped also to a closer racial and cultural fusion between Bengal and Orissa than was found possible between any other neighbouring provincialities. This old process of inter-provincial union or fusion was further advanced under British rule by the establishment of a common administration over these two provinces. Bengalee promised to become the cultural language of Orissa when I first went there. Bengalee was in many places the second language in the Orissa schools, as in Bengal proper. There was as yet no jealousy of the Bengalee among the people of Orissa. In fact, the makers of modern Orissa were, almost without a single exception, domiciled Bengalees. The cry of Orissa for the Oriyas had not as yet been raised, and economic competition had not commenced as yet to create a serious bar to inter-provincial fusion and unity. Educated Bengalees had themselves no conceit of provinciality, and looked upon Orissa as much as their own mother country as they did upon Bengal proper. The old Oriya language and literature were indeed closely akin to the ancient Bengalee language and literature. When I first went to Orissa in 1879, my contact with Oriya language and literature created the impression upon me that these represented only an ancient and archaic type of Bengalee language and literature itself. The rising generation of Orissa were as eager to study the Bengalee language and literature as they were to cultivate their own mother tongue.

Cuttack had been from of old the seat of the Hindu government in Orissa. Under the British also Cuttack continued to be the principal city in Orissa. It was the seat of the Commissioner of the Orissa Division. Cuttack was also the centre of the intellectual and cultural life of the province. As early as 1841 an English school had been established in Cuttack. This

was raised to a high school affiliated to the Calcutta University in 1868. Eight years later, in 1876, Cuttack was endowed with a full-fledged college teaching up to the M.A. degree examination of the University of Calcutta, supported by Government and controlled by the Department of Public Instruction, Bengal. The college was named after Mr. Revenshaw, who was Commissioner of Orissa at one time.

The most prominent public man in Cuttack, when I went there, was Babu Gouri Sankar Roy, who edited a Oriya weekly, the *Utkal Darpan*, and was secretary of the Cuttack Printing Company. This company not only owned a printing press and the weekly newspaper, but also had built a public hall, the Cuttack Printing Hall, in which was located a public library. This printing Hall was a great influence in those days in the cultural life of young Oriyas; and it was here that I came in close contact with the representatives and leaders of the new intellectual and national movement in Orissa.

The school to which I was appointed as headmaster was a private school. In those days private schools were springing up almost all over Bengal to meet the increasing demand for English education of our people. Even where we had government schools these were not adequate to meet the educational requirements of the localities where they had been established. There was not sufficient accommodation for the large and increasing number of students eager to have English education. They were also comparatively more expensive than the private institutions. Public spirited young men, who had themselves received a fairly high education and who were moved by the new spirit of patriotism and public service, oftentimes set up these schools and found their life-work here. Babu Peary Mohan Acharya, the founder and proprietor of the Cuttack Academy, belonged to this type of our old educated countrymen. Passing out of college before taking his degree he started this school, and became himself its rector. He had a fairly good income from his landed properties, and had therefore no imperative need to seek government service. He had been drawn to the Brahmo Samaj and was a leading member of the local Brahmo congregation. In inviting me to take charge of his school, Babu Peary Mohan was moved also by a desire to get a Brahmo worker in his town.

The Ravenshaw College, Cuttack, was then manned practically by Bengalees. Babu Sashi Bhusan Datta, who subsequently rose to a senior place in the Bengal Educational Service, and was a senior professor in the Presidency College, Calcutta, at the time of his retirement some years ago, was Professor of Philosophy in Cuttack in the early seventies. Babu Kshirode Chandra Roy, a well-known Bengalee man of letters and the first Bengalee anthropologist, had been for many years headmaster of the Collegiate School in Cuttack. He was headmaster of the Puri High School when I went to Cuttack. Both Babu Sashi Bhusan Datta and Babu Kshirode Chandra Roy were members of the Brahmo Samaj. They had both been initiated in 1870 or '71 by Keshub Chunder Sen. Babu Bhairab Chandra Banerjee was the leader of the District Bar in Cuttack in those days, and he too was, though not a member of the Brahmo community, an honest sympathiser of the movement, and if I remember aright, he occasionally officiated as minister of the Brahmo Samaj in Cuttack. His relations, however, were more intimate with Maharshi Devendra Nath and the Adi Brahmo Samaj than with the Brahmo Samaj of India. It was here at Cuttack that I made the acquaintance of Principal Girish Chandra Bose and the late Mr. Byomkesh Chakravarty. Mr. Bose had, I think, his first appointment in the Bengal Education Service as professor of science and was posted to the Ravenshaw College. Mr. Chakravarty also went at the same time to Cuttack as professor of mathematics. It was here at Cuttack that I entered public life as minister of the local Brahmo Samaj and general lecturer on both social and political subjects. Among those whose friendship I was privileged to have at Cuttack were the late Babu Radhanath Roy and the late Babu Madhusudan Rao. Radhanath Babu was at that time deputy inspector of schools in Cuttack and Babu Madhusudan Rao was an assistant teacher in the Collegiate School. Babu Radhanath was already a recognised Oriya poet. Though not a member of the new Brahmo community, he had, like the majority of English-educated Bengalees of that generation, sincere sympathies with the Brahmo Samaj movement. Babu Madhusudan Rao, as his name shows, was a domiciled Mahratta. He was practically a pioneer of the Brahmo

Samaj in Orissa, being among the very first domiciled Brahmos in Cuttack who discarded the Brahminical thread, educated his daughters and when they were of age gave them in marriage in accordance with the Brahmo ritual. He was also a recognised Oriya writer and like Babu Radhanath left his impress upon the development of modern Oriya literature. Madhusudan Rao rose to a high position in the Education Service in Orissa, and retired from the post of the headmaster of the Cuttack Normal School. Though government servants, both Babu Radhanath Roy and Babu Madhusudan Rao were among the leaders of the public life of Cuttack, if not of Orissa, in the eighties of the last century.

I was at Cuttack only for a year, or more correctly for ten or eleven months. As headmaster it was my duty, as it was also my right, to make selections of the candidates who would be allowed to appear at the entrance examination of the University from the Cuttack Academy. The test examination was held before the Puja vacation, and I selected so far as I remember, four candidates for appearing at the university examination the following November, and having filled up and signed their application forms I left these with the fees collected from them with the proprietor Babu Peary Mohan Acharya and came for the Puja vacation to Calcutta. On my return after the Pujas I found that one of the boys whom I had refused to send up for the examination had got his application form certified and signed behind my back by the proprietor, who had also thrown away the other application forms signed and certified by me replacing these by fresh forms which were signed and certified by him. It was a denial of my right and my authority as headmaster which I could not possibly submit to. Immediately upon my return to Cuttack I tendered my resignation and came back to Calcutta. One of the four students whom I had selected for the entrance examination from the Cuttack Academy stood first in the whole of the Orissa Circle at the examination of 1879. Thus ended my first career as a school master. Short as it was, it was my first stepping-stone to public life, and I shall always be grateful to Providence and those who were His instruments in securing my first post as headmaster of a high English school.

Chapter 19

‘NATIONAL’ EDUCATION AND PUBLIC ACTIVITIES IN SYLHET



Leaving Cuttack I came back to Calcutta not knowing exactly to what I should turn my idle hands now. As far back as 1874 young students from Sylhet reading in the Calcutta University had organised an association under the name of the Sylhet Union. Its main object was to promote closer relations between the different individuals belonging to Sylhet living in Calcutta for study or business. But it was recognised that such unity could not possibly be secured without active cooperation with one another in the pursuit of some common object. This object was found in the promotion of education, particularly female education in the district from which they came. They were receiving a fairly high standard of modern education. They realised the value of this education to themselves and to the family from which they came. Naturally enough they wanted their neighbours and less fortunate countrymen to participate in these benefits. Under inspiration of this patriotic motive these young students banded themselves into this union for self-culture and patriotic service. Babu Jay Gobinda Shome became the president of this union. With his association and under his guidance the Sylhet Union, within a very short time received the recognition of the educated community of Sylhet. When I resigned from the Cuttack Academy Babu Brajendra Nath Sen and Babu Raj Chandra Chaudhury also tendered their resignation; and the three of us came back to Calcutta. The Sylhet Union saw in our unemployment a splendid opportunity for opening a high English school in Sylhet. We offered

our services almost as honorary workers in the proposed school. We went even further, and agreed to shoulder the financial responsibilities of it if only the union would find funds for the initial outlay in house and furniture. We were sanguine of the success of the new institution. When the Sylhet Union was seriously considering this scheme, news came from Sylhet that a private entrance school run by a Mahomedan gentleman and called the Mufti School had decided to close its door with the beginning of the next year (1880). Friends in Sylhet coming to know that I had left Cuttack wired to me forthwith to go to Sylhet and start a school there in place of the Mufti School. I handed over this telegram to the committee of the Sylhet Union, who replied that the union was prepared to send me and my colleagues immediately to Sylhet and bear all our expenses provided the local gentry undertook to find or construct a school house and provide it with the requisite school furniture. This was undertaken by the educated leaders of the town. Thus when after leaving Cuttack I found myself practically at sea Providence opened a new field of service and self-fulfilment before me. About the middle of December, if I remember aright, I found myself once more in my native district. Both of my old colleagues from Cuttack went also with me.

In the summer of 1879 I had been to Sylhet to meet my father. After I left the university and took service my father saw that he could not bring me back to the orthodox Hindu fold by cutting off supplies. When leaving Calcutta for Cuttack I wrote to him about it. He asked me to go home once to see him. This I did during the summer recess of my school. I had heard at Calcutta on my way back from Cuttack in May 1879 that my father was at our village home in Poil. So instead of going direct to Sylhet I went to Poil, leaving the steamer at a station near Habiganj, the sub-divisional headquarters of south-western Sylhet. But my father had already gone back to Sylhet. I had thus to travel by boat from our home at Poil to Sylhet. During summer the waterways in Sylhet get dried up and one travelling by boat has to follow the meandering course of the rivers which takes a much longer time than travelling by road or by boat during the rainy season. My

father had been expecting me in Sylhet long before I actually reached it. And I heard it from friends that for almost a week previously he used to go to the river-ghat every evening in the hope of meeting my boat. I arrived one evening at about nine or ten. It was a tragic meeting between father and son. This was our first meeting after my mother's death about five years previously. During these five years I had not gone to Sylhet. During these five years my father had married again for the third time, because I had joined the Brahmo Samaj. He wanted to make a last effort to win me away from the Brahmo Samaj. A few minutes after I reached our home in Sylhet he called me to him, and said, "I know you must be very hungry after this long journey. But I have not as yet been able to decide what I should do with you, and I have therefore arranged only for some light refreshments for you. So you will take these things here in this room and pass the night. Tomorrow I shall decide whether I shall admit you into your rightful place in this family." Now that I have myself become a father I can very well realise how my father must have felt when for conscience sake he could not receive me and dine with me that evening. The next morning he sent word to Mrs. Navakishore Sen, who occupied the same building with my father, and also to his close neighbours that if they received me in their own house and admitted me into their kitchen or dining room he would be forced to deny himself the pleasure of dining with them in the future. Mrs. Sen was four or five years older than myself. She used to call my mother as 'mother', and she always treated me as a younger brother. As soon as she heard that my father had practically put me out of caste, she sent for me and forcibly drew me inside her kitchen, saying whatever my father might do, had my mother been living she would not let me go without my food the previous night or serve my meals as to an outcaste. "I am not willing to obey him in this matter, though he is almost a father to me" she declared. My father called me and told me that he would not take any notice of my conduct when I was away from home, but he desired this that as long as I was with him in Sylhet I should observe the rules of caste. I told him how could I observe what I believed to be false. Of course, I would not go out of my

way to outrage his feelings, I assured him. But if a low caste person or a Mahomedan should enter my room when I was drinking a glass of water I would neither throw that water away nor ask him to go out. My father held no further argument with me. He did not even utter a single angry word at the outrage I was committing on his social loyalties. He held out no threat to me. But telling a cousin of mine who was present at the interview and who lived in the same compound with my father with his family that he should provide my meals but must under no circumstance let me into his kitchen or dining room, as long as I was in Sylhet, my father walked away and the same evening left for his village home. Thus the breach between father and son became complete.

I believed, when called to take up this new work in Sylhet, that my father was away in our village home at Poil having retired from his practice, and there was little chance of his coming to town at least immediately. So there would be no difficulty in taking up my residence, in any case for the first few days, in our own house in Sylhet. But as soon as my father heard that I was going to Sylhet to take up this new educational work, he wrote to Babu Navakishore Sen, who occupied part of that house that under no circumstance I should be allowed to stay there. Thus I found myself in Sylhet in January 1880 openly excommunicated from society and formally and publicly cut off by my father.

We three, myself, Brajendra Nath Sen and Raj Chandra Choudhury, all Brahmos, excommunicated from the parent Hindu society, had thus to take a separate house. Our first difficulty was about domestic service. No Hindu would serve us. An old retainer of my father's agreed to do the necessary shopping for us and even cook our food provided we did not enter the kitchen, but he could not, for fear of losing his own caste, touch the leavings of our food, or wash and clean our plates and glasses. But after a few days even this help was refused us. His affection for me was deep and genuine, but the fear of losing caste on account of his close association with me was stronger; and almost with tearful eyes he came and asked my permission to take up his lodgings elsewhere, while he was ready to loyally serve as an orderly in

the school. We then secured a so-called untouchable to do our shopping and cooking; but even he would not touch our leavings or clean and wash our platters and glasses. We had to engage a Mahomedan to do these works for us. He was employed as groom in Babu Navakishore Sen's stable. He used to come and clean and wash our plates twice every day. But this gave offence to many of our Hindu friends, who felt deeply hurt by our engaging a Mahomedan even for this work. Yet there were very few among English-educated Hindus of the town who did not come and take their meals not exactly in strictest secrecy but almost in open secrecy with us, particularly every Saturday evening when we used to have a regular feast in our house on all sorts of forbidden delicacies ordered from the Mahomedan butler of the local dak bungalow. And it was the common talk of the town that the Mahomedan syce who came to clean and wash our plates and glasses found as many as twelve or fifteen plates and glasses put out for him every Sunday morning while his masters were only three. How three gentlemen could eat and drink out of as many as ten to fifteen plates and glasses was absolutely beyond his comprehension. The fact of the matter really was that almost everybody in the local Hindu community knew who were our regular guests at these heterodox dinners, but no one dared or cared to kick up a row over it. This was in 1880, while ten years previously in 1870, people had been put out of caste for taking biscuits!

Our new school, which was christened as the Sylhet National School, was opened about the first or second of January 1880. By the end of March we had on our rolls about four hundred boys, or only just less than fifty of the number on the rolls of the old and well-established government school. This was an achievement far beyond our wildest dreams. I was the rector of this school, Babu Brajendra Nath Sen was mathematical teacher and Babu Raj Chandra Chaudhuri was teacher of history and geography. Another friend, Babu Radha Nath Chaudhuri, soon joined with the same status as ours, that is, as missionary workers, not engaged on any fixed salary but who agreed to take what remained from the collections after the other teachers had been

paid and other incidental expenses had been met, in equal proportion as Brajendra, Raj Chandra and myself.

The advent of three full-fledged Brahmos, excommunicated for their loyalty to their convictions from the parent society, naturally lent new strength and inspiration to the Sylhet Brahmo Samaj. I was soon elected a minister of this congregation. Our activities were, however, not confined to the school and the Brahmo Samaj only. The ideal that possessed us was much larger. It was also social and political. The vow which I had taken to devote myself to the spiritual and religious regeneration of myself and my country as well as to secure the uplift of our people intellectually, morally, socially, and politically, aiming at the development of the highest ideal of freedom, personal, social and political, drove me at once to every field of our new public life in Sylhet. Even before I went to Cuttack, I had discovered my gifts of public speaking. At Cuttack I had found my first field for the cultivation of this gift. In Sylhet I found myself soon the public lecturer, who was requisitioned for every occasion, from the public meetings organised by local officials in furtherance of their own objects to demonstrations against official high-handedness or official measures distasteful to the people. I remember how I was invited by the district magistrate to address a meeting convened by him with the chief commissioner of Assam in the chair to collect subscriptions in aid of the so-called Patriotic Fund which had been started by Lord Lytton's government to help the families of the dead and disabled sepoys in the Afghan war.

But my first love was, of course, the Brahmo Samaj, and a systematic platform propaganda was started immediately I was established in Sylhet both among the youthful students and the general public which I had very largely to carry on myself. Nor was this all. A new political association of the name of the Sylhet Association was also started about this time with my old friend—alas now no more on this side—Nabin Chandra Sharma, a leading member of the District Bar, as honorary secretary, while I was appointed as its honorary assistant secretary.

Sylhet had, as already recorded, a weekly Bengali newspaper, the *Shrihatta-Prakas*, founded by Babu Peary

Charan Das. But it had, however, seen its best days. When I went back to Sylhet in 1880, this paper was in a moribund condition. Besides, the new thought and life in the town could hardly be put into this old bottle. So a small limited liability company was started with a realised capital of Rs. 2,500/-, with which a hand press and necessary types and accessories were bought and taken from Calcutta. There were very few compositors and pressmen available in Sylhet in those days. Those who had learnt press work, three or four persons, were all employed in the Shrihatta-Prakas Press which, even though the weekly news-sheet had ceased publication, still was working for printing notices and zemindary forms and returns, etc. When this new press was bought printers and compositors had to be taken along with it from Calcutta, while a pressman was imported from the neighbouring town of Mymensingh where already they had established a flourishing printing business round the weekly newspaper, *Bharat-Mihir*, edited by the late Anath Bandhu Guha. Though a muffed publication, the *Bharat-Mihir* had from the very start secured for itself a high place in Bengali journalism of those days. Later on, about 1883 or '84, *Bharat-Mihir* was brought down to Calcutta from Mymensingh. But it never got back its old place in Bengalee journalism. The *Bharat-Mihir* press, however, flourished in Calcutta and its proprietor, Babu Kali Narayan Sannyal, left behind him not only a rich printing establishment but also a premier type foundry in Bengal.

With the new men and printing materials a new Bengalee weekly was started in Sylhet about the middle of 1880, and I was invited to be its editor. When my father practically sent me away from his house in Sylhet, I with my Brahmo colleagues, Brajendra Nath Sen and Raj Chandra Chaudhuri, took up our quarters in a two-storied small building on the eastern bank of our local Lal-Dighi, at the back of our chief bazar, called 'Bandar Bazar'. This press was also housed in this building; while we occupied the first floor of it, the ground floor was given to the press. The name of our new Bengalee weekly was *Paridarshak* and the press was also registered under that name. Like the *Bharat-Mihir* of Mymensingh, the *Paridarshak* of Sylhet also almost from its birth

commanded public attention and soon became one of the most powerful exponents of educated public opinion not only of the district of Sylhet but more or less of the whole province of Bengal. Brajendra, Raj Chandra and, later on, Radhanath Chaudhuri, all of us, worked both at the new National School and at this newspaper and press also. It was my first independent charge in journalism, and subsequent career in this line has been very largely indebted to this first opportunity that my Sylhet friends found me. The *Paridarshak* Press initiated me also in the art of printing. Because from the very first day that I was placed in charge of the *Paridarshak*, I found that if we were to carry on this work regularly and efficiently, we would have to work out our freedom from the domination of the men who had been imported from Calcutta; and the only way to secure this was for us to learn and, if possible, master the printer's work, setting up matter, correcting proofs and even working the printing machine. And we all of us, more or less, soon mastered this art, and this had a very great moral influence upon our composing and printing establishment who soon came to realise it that should they strike work or misbehave and force us to dismiss them for wilful misconduct, we could immediately wire for a fresh set of compositors from Calcutta and during the week or two that might take the new men to reach Sylhet, we would be able to maintain the regularity of our weekly issue.

During my stay in Sylhet in connection with the National School and the *Paridarshak*, the wave of the new Hindu revival and reaction touched our little town also. While we were carrying on a somewhat vigorous religious and social propaganda along the lines of the Brahmo Samaj, a section of our educated fellow-townsmen started a counter propaganda in support of current Hindu ceremonials and institutions. For some time before the Cooch Behar marriage the Brahmo Samaj had been rapidly losing its hold on the educated Bengalee, and a movement of social and religious reaction had slowly been making head as a counterblast to the Brahmo propaganda. The leader of this movement was my old friend the late Babu Bipin Behari Das. He had at one time joined the Brahmo Samaj and was one of the many young

men of our university who enthusiastically welcomed Keshub Chunder Sen back home to Calcutta after his English visit. I had read a poem composed on that occasion by Babu Bipin Behari before I came to Calcutta. He was one of the most successful students in the university from our District. He had passed the M.A. degree examination early in the seventies and after taking his law degree he had joined the District Bar before I went back to Sylhet to take up this educational work in the new National School. In Calcutta Bipin Babu was more or less with Sundari Mohan and myself in our social reform activities. He belonged to the Shaha caste, who had in those days been regarded as untouchables by the higher caste Hindus. We refused to observe this iniquitous custom and freely dined with Shaha students who came from our district. Bipin Babu and his fellow-castemen openly commended us for our courage and liberalism as long as they were in Calcutta. But they took up a different attitude towards us in Sylhet. They too treated us as outcastes just as our Hindu relations did. Gradually Bipin Babu started with some others of his own caste a definite Hindu propaganda with the obvious object of fighting the movement of religious and social reform which the Brahmo Samaj represented and which in Sylhet we openly and somewhat vigorously tried to advance among the rising generation of our people. The strangest thing, however, which I soon discovered in this quarrel between us of the Brahmo Samaj and Babu Bipin Behari Das, advocating the cause of popular and orthodox Hinduism, was that the sympathy of practically the whole of higher caste Hindus was with us instead of being with Bipin Babu and his movement. And the reason of it was, as an old relation of mine one day frankly gave out, that even though I and my friends had abjured our ancestral faith and had openly broken away from the regulations of caste and ancient customs, our kinsmen could not get rid of their partialities for us. This relation of mine plainly told me, when I asked him how was it that he sided with me as against the defender of his own faith in this controversy, that notwithstanding anything that I might believe or do, I was one of them, while Bipin Babu was an untouchable and could set up no manner of pretensions to preach to the higher

castes. It showed how in those days caste had completely usurped the place of religion in our old society.

During this controversy between us of the Brahmo Samaj and Babu Bipin Behari Das an interesting incident happened that unexpectedly brought new strength to our elbow. Rama Bai Sarasvatee, the well-known Brahmin lady, who in the company of her brother had come to Bengal from the Maharashtra and had been holding disquisitions with our Brahmin Pandits and had won universal commendation as exceptionally learned, came on her second visit to Sylhet about this time. This encouraged our opponents who commenced to organise public addresses by Rama Bai and her learned brother on Hindu religion and traditions. When this new propaganda was going on, news came of the arrival in our distant town of a very learned Pandit from the Maharashtra, and he was immediately captured by the party of Babu Bipin Behari Das, and a public meeting was advertised to hear him. He was believed to be an orthodox Pandit who knew no language except his vernacular and, of course, Sanskrit. He was therefore advertised to deliver a lecture in Sanskrit on Hinduism. The hall was literally overcrowded not only by the English-educated residents of the town, but even orthodox Brahmins, who knew not a word of English and who were more or less untouched by modern influences flowing so strongly about them, came in large numbers from far and near to see and hear this great Pandit who could handle the divine language with the same ease and freedom with which people handle their vernacular. I and my friends of the Brahmo Samaj also went to hear this unknown Pandit. But naturally we took back seats at this pro-orthodox demonstration. From the very commencement of his address we were profoundly impressed by the wonderful facility with which he spoke in simple Sanskrit, as if instead of being what is called a dead language it was to him almost as much living as our own mother-tongue. This impression deepened more and more as he proceeded until the subject-matter of his discourse revealed to our wondering mind that he was no mere Pandit as Pandits go, but possessed a very wide knowledge of modern researches and investigations. In fact, though he had

been advertised to lecture on Hinduism, he commenced to tell us how through the discovery of Sanskrit, the thought of the whole world was rapidly being revolutionised. He commenced to severely criticise our ancient methods of education and put forward a powerful plea for a more intelligent study of our own ancient language and literature. In fact, his lecture seemed to deal not with Hindu religion at all but with modern comparative philology. This seriously upset Babu Bipin Behari Das and the other conveners of this meeting. Pandit Shrinivasa Shastree, Pandita Rama Bai's brother, had been put on the presidential chair. As the lecturer commenced to develop his theme, the organisers became more and more impatient and repeatedly slip after slip commenced to pass from Bipin Babu to the president urging him to pull the lecturer back to his theme of Hindu religion. When this was being insisted upon, the lecturer suddenly broke out in English, and so pure was his language and so perfect his intonation that he literally took the breath of his audience away by this revelation of his education and modern culture. Without wasting a moment's time, he said: "Gentlemen, I must no longer conceal my identity. My name is Shreepada Babaji Thakur. I belong to the Bombay Civil Service. I had been to England to pass the usual competitive examination to enter the civil service." And having thus introduced himself to the audience, he spoke in English on comparative philology and the necessity of a more intelligent and critical study of our ancient language and literature not only to learn the niceties of grammar and lexicon but, what was far more important, to realise how these old looks gave ample and incontrovertible evidences of the outer historical and commercial no less than cultural relations of our mother-country with all the advanced countries of the ancient world. This lecture completely turned the table against those who had got it up with the hope of strengthening their reactionary movement and putting down the Brahmo propaganda. Shreepada Babaji Thakur became from the next day our guest, was housed in the furnished and commodious garden house of one of the leading Mahomedan zemindars of the town.

The secret of his romantic adventure soon came out. He had come to Sylhet *incognito*, not to preach Hinduism or out of idle curiosity to see this out-of-the-way town among the hills of Cachar and Jaintiya, but to woo and, if possible, win the fair widow, Rama Bai Sarasvatee, for his wife. His object in agreeing to lecture to us in Sanskrit was to meet Rama Bai on the same platform and conquer her, if possible, by establishing a strong intellectual kinship with her. But this was not to be, because, somehow or other, Rama Bai refused to attend his lecture. Thus disappointed he found that he had no reason to continue to conceal his identity. He stayed as our guest for a couple of days, and then went back to Bombay, a disappointed suitor for the hand of the famous Pandita.

The real cause of his disappointment came out in course of the next month or two. When Shreepada Babaji Thakur went to Sylhet Rama Bai's heart had already been either captured or was in the process of being captured by Babu Bipin Behari Das. Bipin Babu had a commanding presence. Tall of stature, strong of limbs, well-knit and well-proportioned physique, he was so made that his very sight had a fascinating appeal even to men, how much more was it likely to appeal to a woman. To this physical presence was added intellectual acquisitions of no mean order, and these must have combined to capture the senses and the intelligence of the learned Pandita. Bipin Babu followed her from Sylhet to Dacca, and his pertinacity was ultimately rewarded. In the autumn of 1880 the Pandita was joined in wedlock to this Bengalee from Sylhet.

The marriage took place at Bankipore, and was registered under the Civil Marriage Act III of 1872. Mr. Beveridge and his wife, who had themselves been married under this Act, helped the marriage of the Pandita by their presence and patronage. Mrs. Beveridge had come out to India to take charge of the Banga Mahila Vidyalyaya started by Babus Durga Mohan Das and Ananda Mohan Bose to provide high liberal education in English to the ladies of the progressive section of the Brahmo Samaj. Her maiden name was Miss Ackroyd. Mr. Beveridge had always great sympathy with the movement of social and religious

freedom represented by the Brahmo Samaj and this common sympathy brought him and Miss Ackroyd together, ultimately leading to their marriage. Babu Bipin Behari Das's marriage with Pandita Rama Bai Sarasvatee and his consequent excommunication from his caste and community was an instance of poetic justice.

During my stay in Sylhet in connection with the new National School my father made one more attempt to win me back. About the middle of the year he came to the town for this purpose. The ostensible object of his visit was to make his last will and testament disinheriting me. All his friends in Sylhet, members of the subordinate judicial and executive services, as well as his colleagues at the Bar, tried hard to dissuade him from taking this step. But he was as firm as adamant. The utmost that he was induced to do was to agree to allow me to continue my work in the School, the Brahmo Samaj and on the *Paridarshak*, and make an allowance of Rs. 100 a month as my pocket money if I went and took up my residence in his town house by myself. His object was to separate me from Babu Raj Chandra Choudhury, who had discarded the Brahminical thread and had thereby openly broken away from the Hindu communion. Association with him made me liable to the same punishment. As a non-Brahmin I had no sacred thread to throw away. So far my repudiation of my allegiance to Hindu orthodoxy had been more or less verbal. I was no doubt publicly taking forbidden food and drink, but Hindu society had already commenced to tolerate the petty lapses in her rebellious children. Some of my relations and friends freely dined with us and enjoyed these forbidden victuals. All this was well-known, but nobody caused any trouble over these violations of orthodox rules. My father saw that society would equally similarly tolerate my lapses also if only I separated myself from my friend, Babu Raj Chandra Choudhury, who had burnt the bridge behind him. My father's friends tried to persuade me to accept this generous offer of his. I was then suffering almost perpetual privations, the income from the school left very little to us, that is, Brajendra Nath, Raj Chandra and myself, after the other teachers had been paid. The *Paridarshak* was also not as

yet a paying concern, and I received nothing for my work as its editor. It so happened therefore that many a day we had to live on one meal only. In the face of these difficulties and privations an allowance of a hundred rupees a month would certainly be a great help to me and to my work. This is how my father's friends put the case before me. But I was mortally afraid of accepting this help from him, particularly as his offer was conditional upon my separating myself from Raj Chandra Choudhury. My privations and sufferings were themselves a source of very great moral strength to me. If I accepted my father's offer and entered a life of comparative ease and physical comforts, my inner strength, I felt, would commence to decrease; and on the other hand my father also would be encouraged to turn the screw more and more until my defeat was completed and I deserted the Brahmo Samaj and the cause for which it stood openly for the lure of physical comforts and worldly conveniences. These considerations saved me, by the grace of God, from walking into this trap. My reply to my father's offer was that if he allowed me to go to his town house and take up my residence there with my Brahmo colleagues I would gladly and gratefully do so. But to accept his offer with the condition attached to it would mean open disloyalty to my conscience and to my religious principles. I could not therefore honestly accept that offer. This was my father's last attempt to win me back. When I refused to accept this offer he made his will. By this will he directed that after his death his main properties would be devoted to the maintenance of a school and a hospital in his native village. As for my step-mother and widowed sister and her little daughter, they would be entitled to an allowance adequate for keeping them in the station of life to which they belonged. Further, it was also provided that the continuance of the family worship and *pujas* would be secured by the income of his property. My father's friends, who were anxious to protect my interests, failing to dissuade him from disinheriting me completely, made a last appeal to him to dispose of his property just as he liked, but only as a mark of his affection for and confidence in me, to nominate me as the executor of his will. At this my father made a characteristic reply, saying that it

would be quite in the fitness of things that in arranging for the annual Durga Puja his family would have to come to a *cazi* or a Moslem judge, to secure his sanction. This silenced those who were fighting for me, and the separation between father and son not only during his life but even after his death was thus completed. From this time my father would not hold any communication with me. He refused to accept my letters. He would not permit me to go near him, not even when, as happened during his short stay at Sylhet about the middle of 1880, he was ill and I wanted to see him.

The rather heavy strain on my strength, caused by hard work and insufficient nourishment, soon commenced to tell on my health. In June or July 1880, Keshub Chunder Sen completely cut himself off from the old ideals and doctrines of the Brahmo Samaj, as we then thought, and proclaimed the advent of his Nava-Vidhan or New Dispensation. This provoked a new and vital conflict between him and his following on the one side and the general body of Brahmos on the other. The wave of this new moral and theological war did not take long to reach us even in far distant Sylhet. We had in the local Brahmo Samaj a few loyal followers of Keshub. And a debate was proposed to be held between them and us, who were members of the Sadharana Brahmo Samaj. This meeting was held one evening, and practically the entire educated community of the town, numbering over five hundred, gathered to hear this debate. At this debate I was on my legs from seven in the evening to nearly eleven at night. The whole audience sat out this long meeting and listened to our discussion with absorbing interest. The next morning I started spitting blood, not in large quantities but in deep red streaks. This frightened the local doctors, who ordered me to take leave of my school immediately, and as the damp climate of Sylhet was considered extremely dangerous for one who was suspected of pulmonary affections, I was forced to come to Calcutta for treatment. Thus was prematurely cut off my educational, journalistic and missionary career in my own native district. I had not the wherewithal to meet the expenses of this change and rest. These were found by friends, and I found myself

back in Calcutta by the end of July 1880. Sundari Mohan, without consulting me, wrote to my father immediately he came to know of my condition asking for his help. My father replied that he did not recognise me as his son and accepted no manner of obligation for my health or my life. God's will must prevail in this matter. However, if I agreed to perform expiation and re-enter Hindu society, he would immediately come down to Calcutta with his family and take charge of my treatment and nursing. This was his last offer. If I refused to accept it, he would on his part completely wash his hands of one who had wilfully deserted his proper place and who was no longer his son. Expert medical opinion in Calcutta, however, did not find any reason to suspect any physical tendency in me. But the doctors here did not advise me to go back to Sylhet. So I had to definitely abandon my post in the Sylhet National School, my place being gradually taken up by Radha Nath Chaudhuri, who conducted it until his death at an early age, about the middle of the eighties of the last century. After his death the Sylhet National School was taken over by Raja Girish Chandra Ray, and became the foundation of the present Murari Chand College. And as for myself, I soon found a new place at Bangalore in Mysore, where I went about the end of August 1881, as headmaster of Rai Bahadur Arcot Narayanswami Mudaliar's High English School.



AUTHOR'S FAMILY GROUP (age 30).

Chapter 20

MADRAS FIFTY YEARS AGO



Madras and Bengal have come very close to each other today. When I first went there in 1881, it was more or less an unknown land to us. I think Keshub Chunder Sen was the first educated Bengalee to visit Madras in the late sixties of the last century. That visit of the young Brahmo leader was followed by that of Bhai Amritalal Bose, who made a fairly extensive tour and long stay in that presidency in connection with the missionary propaganda of the new Brahmo Samaj of India. He met with cordial reception from some sections of the people, particularly the Kanarese. When Amrita Babu went to Bangalore, he found a strong colony of Kanarese residing in the cantonment there. They were drawn to the Brahmo Samaj by the preachings of Bhai Amritalal and established a Brahmo congregation in Bangalore. With the transfer of their regiment from Bangalore to Mangalore, this congregation was also removed to that town where there is now a strong Brahmo Samaj, the members of which follow the Brahmo laws of domestic and social life. The next Bengalee who visited Madras was Pandit Shivanath Shastri. After his ordination as minister and missionary of the Sadharana Brahmo Samaj, Pandit Shastri went on a missionary tour to the southern presidency. In course of this tour he visited both the city of Madras and Bangalore among other *mufassil* places. This first visit of his was followed, I believe, by other missionary tours in that presidency. And it was through him that I secured the post of headmaster in Rai Bahadur Arcot Narayanswamy's High School at Bangalore. Mr. Gopalswamy Iyer was at that time the headmaster of the Regimental School at Bangalore. This school was maintained by the Military Department for the benefit of the members of the Indian regiment stationed at Bangalore and their

boys. Mr Gopalswamy was associated with the local Brahmo Samaj, originally established by the leaders of the Canarese sepoy colony when that regiment had been stationed at Bangalore. Gopalswamy was a fairly educated man and had the qualities of popular leadership to some extent. Though a poor schoolmaster, Gopalswamy was a recognised public man in the civil and military station of Bangalore, commanding by his character considerable influence over the educated community of the place. It was mainly through his influence, I believe, that Rai Bahadur Arcot Narayanswamy Mudaliar, one of the multi-millionaires of the place, had been drawn to the Brahmo Samaj. Narayanswamy started life in humble circumstances. The famine of the early seventies, that decimated the whole presidency of Madras, found him his opportunity. Starting with some petty contracts for the supply of rice to the famine-stricken people in connection with government relief measures, Arcot Narayanswamy soon rose to a high position as government contractor, and it was by this work that he gradually built up his large fortune. At the close of the famine operations, Arcot Narayanswamy found himself the owner of many lacs and the proprietor of the largest and richest miscellaneous stores in Bangalore. His services in connection with famine relief in his district were rewarded by the government by a Rai Bahadurship, which has become very cheap today but which was a rare and therefore much coveted distinction fifty years ago. Narayanswamy, encouraged by this recognition and moved, I have no doubt, equally by the desire to devote some portion of his unexpected fortune to the service of his God through service of His children, established and endowed this high school. Though not socially a Brahmo, Rai Bahadur Arcot Narayanswamy had imbibed deep respect for the ideals of the Samaj and held the character of the Brahmos in very high regard. Pandit Shivanath had been to Bangalore in 1879 and '80, when he made the Rai Bahadur's acquaintance. The Rai Bahadur was anxious that the rising generation of his countrymen should come under the moral influence of the Brahmo Samaj and therefore asked Pandit Shivanath to find a Brahmo young man from Bengal to take charge of his school as headmaster. When I came back from

Sylhet to Calcutta and was without any employment, Pandit Shivanath asked me to take up this work and go to Bangalore as headmaster of this school where, he said, I would find a large and virgin field for Brahmo mission work also.

When sending me off to Bangalore Pandit Shivanath Shastri told me that I would find there a group of educated young men who cut their hair like ourselves and used boots and shoes. I asked him what was the meaning of it. He smiled and said, "They are the advanced reformers in Madras." Cutting the hair instead of shaving the head as orthodox Brahmins did and using boots and shoes instead of slippers and sandals indicated social revolt in the Madras Presidency. That was the state of things in Madras when I first went there in the autumn of 1881. I took train at Howrah. If I remember aright I travelled by the Punjab Mail. Locomotion was much slower then than it is today. It takes now about fifteen hours to reach Allahabad from Calcutta. When I first went it took about twenty-four hours to get to Allahabad. From Allahabad, after a halt of nearly an hour, the train for Bombay recrossed the Ganges and coming back to Naini branched off towards Jubbulpore. Jubbulpore was reached, if I remember, the next evening. At Jubbulpore I had to transfer myself to the G.I.P. train, and after thirty-six hours arrived at Bombay in the morning of the third day from Jubbulpore. The journey though long, was, however, not at all tedious to me because of the new experience that I was getting. The greater part of the way from Jubbulpore to Bombay was in those days through extensive and more or less dense forests. All that wilderness has been practically cleared today. Mr. Rajani Nath Ray, who at the time of his death in 1906, was officiating as Accountant-General, Bengal, was Assistant Accountant-General in Bombay in 1881. Babu Rajani Nath was a member of the Brahmo community. After an exceptionally brilliant career in the Calcutta University from which he passed with honours in mathematics, taking the first place in the examination of his year, Rajani Nath was appointed to the Finance Department of the Government of India. Before he passed out of the university he had publicly joined the Brahmo Samaj having been initiated by Keshub Chunder Sen either in

1870 or '71. After passing his final examination in the university, Rajani Nath married Sreematee Bidhumukhi in accordance with the new Civil Marriage Act, his marriage being one of the earliest to have been performed under that Act. The life-story of Bidhumukhi was highly romantic. It was the subject of a small book *Bidhumukhi-charit* which was very popular at one time, particularly among members of the Brahmo Samaj. It was the story of a *kulin* girl of Bikrampur, Dacca, who was rescued from marriage with an old man with many wives, and who found rest and shelter after an anxious chase by the emissaries of her guardians in the Brahmo home for missionaries and workers, called the Bharata-Ashrama, in Calcutta. She was secretly helped out of the family residence of her people by two young relatives who had already joined the Brahmo Samaj. They were two brothers, Sarada Nath and Baroda Nath Halder. Saroda Nath died young; Baroda Nath married in the Brahmo Samaj. Basanti Devi, Mrs C.R. Das, is Baroda Babu's eldest daughter. Mr S.N. Halder, Barrister-at-law, is Baroda Babu's second child and only son. They rescued Bidhumukhi at the risk of their very life, because Bidhumukhi's guardian was a man of great power and influence in his locality in those days. Law and order had not as yet been fully established in the *mufassil* parts of Bengal even in the early seventies of the last century, and the local *zemindars* oftentimes held not only the person and property but even the very life of their neighbours in the hollow of their hands. As soon as it was discovered that Bidhumukhi had been secreted away from her home by the young Halders, messengers were despatched on all sides in pursuit of them. If they had been caught before they got into the railway train at Kusthia, it was practically certain that all three would have been murdered and their dead bodies thrown into the Padma, and if discovered subsequently, nobody would know as to how or by whom they came to their end. After the break-up of the Bharata Ashrama, Bidhumukhi found a home with Mr Durga Mohan Das. She was brought up by Mr Das along with his daughters in the Banga Mahila Vidyalyaya. Rajani Nath also came from Dacca and the element of romance in the earlier life of Bidhumukhi was not absent even when she accepted Rajani

Nath's offer of marriage. But their marriage could not be immediately performed owing to the fact that Bidhumukhi had not as yet attained the twenty-first year of her age, and her natural guardian, not being a member of the Brahmo Samaj, could not possibly be induced to give his permission for this marriage, as was required by the terms of the new law.

When, on my way to Madras, I landed at Bombay—that was the only route then from Calcutta to Madras by land and rail—neither the East Coast Railway from Madras to Waltair, nor the Bengal Nagpur Railway had then been opened, it is doubtful if these had even been under contemplation, I found Mr Rajani Nath's carriage waiting at the station for me. Mr and Mrs Roy were then living at Bandora, one of the suburbs of Bombay. I was their guest for about a week. That was a new and really inspiring experience to me. Bombay was socially far ahead of Bengal. Bengal, or the new Bengal which was building before our eyes, was the creation really of the British. All our progressive movements had been born of the inspiration of freedom and democracy caught by us from our contact with modern European, particularly modern British, culture through our schools and colleges. But Bombay was different. Bombay had very recently a national state and administration. In Maharashtra the Peshwas governed the people to almost the middle of the nineteenth century, that is, about fifty years or thereabout before I first saw it. And this national state had developed certain traits in the Mahratta people and called into being certain social institutions and customs under pressure of what can be best described as the biological requirements of the Marhatta society, which we had no knowledge of in Bengal. Female education and the freedom of social intercourse and movement of respectable Mahratta ladies was a new and inspiring experience which I had in Bombay. Both the Parsis and the Mahrattas did not observe the *zenana* seclusion or the *purdah*, which is universal among higher class Hindus and Moslems in Bengal and Upper India. While we in Bengal were fighting even in the Brahmo Samaj for higher education of ladies and the removal of the *purdah*, these social evils were practically absent from the Indian community of

Bombay. And all this made a very profound impression upon me during my first visit to this city.

I took train at Bombay for Madras. The railway route between Bombay and Madras passes across the *ghats*. The scenery between Kalyan and Poona is perhaps the most beautiful to be found in any railway in India. The engineering skill displayed in building up this section of the Great Indian Peninsula Railway is also of the very highest order. I did not halt anywhere on my way from Bombay to Madras. I saw Poona some years later, on my way from Madras to Lahore after the Madras Congress of 1887. This time I went straight to Madras, changing at Raichur into the Madras Railway. If I remember aright, it took me about forty hours to reach Madras from Bombay. There was already a small Brahmo Samaj at Madras. A Telegu Brahmin of exceptionally simple habits and devout soul was the principal member of this Samaj. He was its secretary and minister. Pandit Shivanath Shastri knew this gentleman very intimately. His name was Butchia Pantalu. He came to receive me at the station, and I was his guest for two or three days until I took train for my destination. The Bangalore Mail, by which I travelled, used to leave Madras in the evening and reach Bangalore early in the next morning. Thus one fine and sunny morning in the month of September I found myself at Bangalore. Mr Gopalswamy Iyer came to the station and offered me a cordial welcome and practically took charge of me. As headmaster of the Regimental School, Mr Gopalswamy lived in regimental quarters, and he found a room for me in the quarters of the head clerk of his school, Mr Narayanswamy Mudaliar. There were two houses in these quarters. One was attached to the school itself, and the other stood facing it on the opposite side of the courtyard. Mr Narayanswamy occupied this latter house with his family, while I was put up in the other house or room which had an ante-room or covered veranda that served as my kitchen.

Mr Gopalswamy had asked one of his students, or more correctly, one of his pupil-teachers, who lived in the school premises, to look after me. This was really very kind and considerate of him. Because I did not know a word of Tamil or

Telegu or Kanarese, the three predominant vernaculars of the Mysore State, it was absolutely necessary for me to have some one about me in my house who knew sufficient English to act as interpreter between me and the local domestic who kept house for me, acting both as cook and maid. My first experience in Bangalore was of such amusing character that I have never been able to forget it. The second day of my sojourn in Bangalore early in the morning I suddenly woke at the sound of my name which was being cried from the street running by my house. It was "Pal, Pal, O". I thought somebody was calling me. But for the life of me I could not understand who this somebody could possibly be. I knew no one as yet in this strange place. Those whose acquaintance I had made in course of the previous day, were not sufficiently familiar with me to address me as mere "Pal". When the next morning I asked my friend Mr Narayanswamy, who could it be that called me early at the very break of day by my name, crying "Pal, Pal, O", he laughed out and said, "it must have been the milk-maid, but she was not serenading under your window, fascinating young man, but only hawking her milk." *Pal* or more correctly *Palo* is Tamil and Telegu for milk.

Before leaving for Bangalore I had been introduced to Sreematee Nritya Kali, a ward of Pandit Shivanath Shastri. Hers also was a romantic story. Married at the age of eight, she became a widow at nine. She came of a very respectable and high-caste Brahmin family. Her eldest brother was employed in the Government Telegraph Department. Early in the seventies of the last century, he was stationed at Allahabad. Like many a soft-hearted Hindu of that generation, he inwardly rebelled against the disabilities imposed upon young Hindu widows, and especially on those who were condemned to lifelong widowhood even before they knew their husbands or were of the age when they might be expected to realise the superb romance of married love or the sanctity of the marital relation. Like the general body of English-educated Bengalees he too had come under the influence of the Brahmo Samaj. Naturally, he inwardly felt a desire to get his young sister remarried if that could be arranged. It so happened

that at Allahabad he found for his immediate neighbour a Brahmo family, the mistress of which had been a Brahmin widow, coming from the same class to which he himself belonged, and who had been remarried in the Brahmo Samaj. This lady was the younger sister of the late Babu Chandi Charan Banerjee, the biographer of Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and a well-known Bengalee writer. Negotiations were opened by Nritya Kali's brother to try if she could be similarly brought to the Brahmo Samaj with a view to her re-marriage. Of course, this could not be done publicly, as it would involve excommunication to her brother, who was not prepared to face it even for his sister's future happiness. In the meantime, Chandi Babu's sister commenced to work upon the tender mind of Nritya Kali and gradually induced her to leave her brother's home and come to the Brahmo Samaj. Her brother all along knew all this, though he dared not openly do anything in the matter. At last the situation seemed to have been seriously and suddenly complicated by some breach between Nritya Kali and her sister-in-law. This set fire to the train that had been slowly laid, and one day she left her brother's home and came to the house of Chandi Babu's sister determined to stay with her and thus cut herself free from the bondage of caste and custom, because Chandi Babu's brother-in-law was not a Brahmin but came from the carpenter caste. But this Brahmo family dared not accept her for fear of her brother and his friends. So she was at once removed to the family of a sympathiser of the Brahmo Samaj, who indeed was expected at that time to completely cast his lot with this new community of religious and social reformers. He was the late Bipin Behari Bose, at that time working as headmaster of the Government Collegiate School at Allahabad. This caused quite a storm not only in the Bengalee Hindu community of Allahabad but more or less all over Hindu Bengal. From Allahabad she was brought to Calcutta and placed in the family of Pandit Shivanath Shastri, where she soon won the place of almost a daughter of the family. I was soon accepted as a suitor of his adopted daughter by Pandit Shivanath and his wife, and before I left for Bangalore, we were formally engaged to be married. The idea was that after I had settled in my new place of

work, I would return for a few days to Calcutta and after getting married go back to Bangalore. But Mr and Mrs Rajani Nath Ray wanted to have a Brahmo marriage in Bombay. So they arranged with Pandit Shivanath Shastri, who was going South on a mission tour, to bring his ward with him to Bombay and wanted me to come there during the Christmas vacation. Thus it was that mine was the first Brahmo marriage in Bombay though both the bride and bridegroom were not of Bombay but Bengalees. The marriage took place in the Prarthana Samaj Mandir at Girgaum. And after the ceremony my wife and myself were the guests of Mr and Mrs Madhodos Raghunathdas, who were the pioneers of the widow marriage movement in Bombay. It was here during my marriage that I first made the acquaintance of Mr Chandravarkar, who soon became one of the leaders of Bombay public life and having succeeded Mr Ranade in the High Court as a puisne judge, was knighted. Mr Chandravarkar was at that time a junior *vakil* in the Bombay High Court, though as editor of the bi-lingual weekly. *Indu-Prakas*, that held more or less the same position in Mahratta journalism which our *Hindoo Patriot* held in Bengal, he was already a well-known public man in his province.

The life-story of Mr. Madhodos Raghunathdas had a fascinating romance about it. Madhodos Raghunathdas belonged to the Guzrati Bania community. He had acquired a fairly large fortune in his business as silk merchant. One day during the summer months while walking along the streets of Bombay he stopped at a roadside house, and asked for a drink of water. It was brought to him by a youthful widow, who at once moved him to pity at the contemplation of her miserable life as a Hindu widow. She was of his own caste. She was of attractive appearance. And then and there Madhodos, who had lost his wife and was himself a widower, made up his mind to woo and win this comely young widow for his wife. It was really what poets call love at first sight on both sides. Thus Dhankar Bai became Madhodos's wife. Their home gradually became the centre of the widow marriage movement in Bombay. Mr and Mrs Madhodos were very intimate friends of the Rays. Dhankar Bai was a particular friend of Mrs. Ray. And it was through her that my

wife before her marriage became intimate with Dhankar Bai. This was how after our marriage we came to be the guests of Mr. and Mrs Madhodos Raghunathdas. Their house stood next door to the Prarthana Samaj Mandir, and as Mr and Mrs Ray lived in the suburbs, the guests were entertained to dinner by Mr and Mrs Madhodos in their house after the ceremony in the *mandir*. Mr Madhodos subsequently built a new Hall in his compound and named it the Widow Marriage hall. Mrs. Madhodos after her husband's death, as in his life-time, offered shelter in her home here to many a young widow and helped to give them suitably in marriage. The last time I met her was in 1901, when I was present at a widow marriage celebrated in the Widow Marriage Hall. The bridegroom was a Guzratee Brahmin, Mr Govindjee, whose 'Atanka Nigraha' patent pills had already won very wide publicity in the country through advertisements that appeared in almost every newspaper and periodical all over India. I was then in charge of *New India* which also had been publishing his advertisement. Mr. Justice Chandravarkar, Mr. Bhajekar, and almost all the supporters and workers of the social reform movement in Bombay were present at this marriage which was celebrated with great *eclat*, Mrs. Madhodos standing as hostess at the reception and dinner that followed. That was the last time when I met her. She passed away a few years later, and with her passed a fascinating and powerful personality in the Social Reform Movement of Bombay. After my marriage my wife told me that Dhankar Bai preserved, as a holy memento, the vessel or *lota* with which she first gave that drink to her future husband. I think she proudly showed it to me also.

After Christmas (1881) I went back to Bangalore. On my way from Bombay a rather strange incident happened which I have not been able to, and shall never, forget. Pandit Shivanath Shastri came to the Boree Bunder station to see my wife and me off. As the train moved he suddenly asked me if I had enough money with me to comfortably reach Bangalore. I said that I had, or that I would manage to reach Madras with what I had. As a matter of fact this was not the strict truth, though I had made up my mind to manage with what I had. The luggage charge had

been overlooked and it was rather heavy. After paying for this, I actually found myself in possession of just fourteen annas to pay our way from Bombay to Madras. In those days they did not allow ladies to travel with their male escorts in third class between Bombay and Poona; because the train passed through a number of tunnels on this part of the journey, and third class carriages were not provided with lights during day time. So we were separated during this part of our journey to Madras. In the loneliness of my compartment I commenced to cast about as to how I should find necessary refreshments for my wife and myself with just fourteen annas from which I would have to pay also for coolies at the changing station, Raichur. So I decided to keep the condition of my purse from my wife and pretending that I had no desire for food, I would spend, in any case that evening, what was needed for her only. But we were rather punctilious in those days about our veracity. I could not therefore tell a lie to my wife that I was not hungry if really I was not full. So the first thing that I did on getting down from the train at Poona was to drink a lot of water, after which I went and brought my wife to my compartment, or more accurately to an empty compartment into which the guard taking pity on this solitary young couple, put us. I then asked her what she would like to take. She asked me what I should desire. I told her that my stomach was full and I would not take anything that night. At this, she also said that she would have nothing unless I shared it with her. Her determination to do this forced me to make a clean breast of the ugly predicament which my want of calculation and foresight had placed me in. She put courage in me, saying, never mind, we could even manage with what we had. We would take that night cheap fruits and fried gram and the like, and spend something the next day, braving it out at night when we could fast in the hope that morning would take us to Madras where friends had already invited us to break our journey as their guests. Next morning we had some tea and biscuits and I had just a couple of annas in my pocket after paying the cooly who took our things from the G.I.P. train to the Madras train at the Raichur Junction. Having put our things in an empty compartment into which the guard very kindly put

us, we were walking up and down the station platform, when a telegraph messenger approached me and asked if my name was Babu Bipin Chandra Pal. I said it was so, and at this he took out a telegram addressed to me and placed with it a ten-rupee note in my hand. I found that this telegram had been sent by Pandit Shastri with this money. Postal money orders had not as yet been introduced in India. Registered and insured covers used then to convey money from one part of the country to another. In case of emergency money could be sent by wire but not as money, but only as reply prepaid for the return message. The telegraph office sends now reply forms in these cases, but in those days, it used to deliver the amount deposited with the office of despatch in cash to the addressee of the telegram. The receipt of this money by wire struck me as a direct intervention of Providence. When I met Pandit Shivanath Shastri some months later, I asked how was it that he sent me to a roadside railway station this money. He told me that though I had told him that I would manage with what I had to reach Madras, he could not get a wink of sleep that night for us, thinking that we had no money to pay for our food on our way. So the first thing that he did the next morning was to send this money by wire to me at the first important changing station through which I would have to pass.

Looking back upon this incident I felt often that Pandit Shivanath was a fairly developed psychic subject, as our friends of the Theosophical Society would say. Indeed I had heard from Pandit Shastri himself of another experience of his which seemed to corroborate this view. At one time, before the birth of the Sadharana Brahmo Samaj, when spiritualism was much in vogue among some of our educated countrymen in Calcutta, Pandit Shastri was invited to attend a spiritualistic seance at the house of a friend interested in these experiments. Pandit Shastri commenced to write automatically, and the detailed story of a grave family scandal of a neighbour came out through his hand. He had no intimacy with this family and knew absolutely nothing of this scandal, but those who knew said that it was all true. This also proved his psychic endowments. But this strange revelation of a grave secret affecting the honour of a respectable family so

staggered him that from that day he resolved never to dabble in spiritualism.

The Brahmo friends at Madras, headed by Mr. Butchia Pantalu, had arranged almost a royal reception for us. They had specially hired a house for us, and here we stopped for five or six days, being entertained by them. They had indeed a fairly big 'love-feast' in our honour to which almost all the members and sympathisers of the Samaj were invited. Besides, we were invited by individual friends to their homes and received presents of *saris* for my wife and *dhotis* for myself from them. I never dreamt when I went to Madras that I would find so many friends in that city and would be so warmly welcomed into their homes. This was specially unexpected, because many of those who did this for us had not cut themselves off from the old and orthodox society as we in Bengal had done. Our visit, however, loosened the old bonds of caste very largely among our Madras friends, and for this we felt sincerely grateful.

My stay in Bangalore was, however, not very long. I went there in August 1881, was married in December of the same year, but had to leave my post there in December 1882. Certain incidents happened about October or November 1882, which wounded my self-respect. It might not have been intentional but it destroyed the old relations that had grown up between the proprietor of the school where I was employed and myself. And I felt I could not continue in his service. So I sent in my resignation, not knowing anything of my future. Just about this time Babu Durga Mohan Das went to Madras to put his second daughter, the present Lady Bose, wife of Sir Jagadish Bose, who had passed the entrance examination of the Calcutta University that year, into the Madras Medical College, which admitted matriculates of any Indian university for medical studies and the medical degree. After settling her there in the family of a pious Danish missionary, Durga Mohan Babu went to Bangalore to see the place. He knew that I was living there and so came to see me. He sent his card to me and this took me by surprise. He had put up at a local European hotel. I insisted upon his coming to my humble quarters which he did the next day. My wife was then in a very poor state

of health. Asked about the reason of it, I said that the climate of Bangalore did not seem to quite agree with her. Durga Mohan Babu said that I must take her away from that place. I replied, how could I? I would have, for one thing, to find some other work for me, and for another, I had not even the wherewithal to pay for our passage to Calcutta. At this he assured me that all this would come. He then invited me to take charge of the education of his two younger sons, Satish Ranjan and Jyotish Ranjan, whom he wanted to send to England to compete for the Indian Civil Service and would like to prepare them for it by withdrawing them from their school and placing them under a whole-time tutor. And he offered me this job and agreed to pay for our passage back to Calcutta. Thus quite unexpectedly succour came to me, and by the end of December 1882 I found myself once more among old friends in Calcutta.

I parted with sincere sorrow from the fairly large circle of friends whom we had acquired at that distant land. The credit was really not mine but my wife's. She had a personal magnetism that drew both men and women to her. Though she did not know English, yet her familiarity with Hindustanee which she had acquired during her sojourn with her brother in the United Provinces gave her a good medium of communication. But it was not her conversational powers, but the silent force of her character that really attracted those who came near her. And our departure from Bangalore so worked upon the feelings of the fairly large circle of our friends, both Hindu and Mahomedan, that for a full fortnight previous to our departure we were not permitted to keep our own house but were practically forced to take up our residence in a new and well-furnished house of a friend, Mr. Singaravelu Mudaliar, at that time employed in the office of the Mysore Dewan. This fortnight every evening there was one function or another, generally a dinner at the house of some friend, to which the entire group that had formed around us were invited. At these dinners Brahmins and non-Brahmins sat down together and there was also one or two Mahomedan friends who were never excluded from these. When we took train for Madras, some of our friends accompanied us part of the way

and I cannot recall at what distance from their home they took leave of us literally with tearful eyes and choking voices. Thus, ended my life in Bangalore. It was a most tender and inspiring experience, and even today I cannot send my mind back to those happy and hopeful days without deep emotion.

Chapter 21

LORD RIPON AND THE NEW POLITICAL AWAKENING



In 1880 there was a change of Ministry in England. Lord Beaconsfield was defeated at the General Election of 1880. The most remarkable feature of this election was Gladstone's Midlothian campaign. The wave of enthusiasm created by that historic campaign in Great Britain touched even us in India. Indian politicians were particularly interested in this election because they had found reasons to believe that if Gladstone came back to power, he would try to undo all the evils that had been done by the Beaconsfield-Lytton Government in India. The Afgan war had already been condemned by the Liberal Opposition in Parliament. Lord Lytton's Indian Vernacular Press Act and the Arms Act had both found material for repeated attacks on the government in the House of Commons. These were prominently dealt with by Mr. Gladstone in his indictment against the Beaconsfield Administration in course of his electioneering campaign. For the first time the administration in India got incorporated into the policy of the Liberals in the House of Commons. I think for the first time, India became, during Gladstone's electioneering campaign, openly a party question. The victory of the Liberals roused considerable hope and enthusiasm in India. These were strengthened by the appointment of Lord Ripon to the Indian Viceroyalty to succeed Lord Lytton. Lord Ripon was perhaps even better known as a religious man than as a politician. His entrance into the Catholic church created almost as much of a sensation in England as the conversion of Newman. It showed his courage of conviction. That fact created a favourable impression upon the educated mind in India. The genuineness of his piety was further proved by the selection of

his Private Secretary, Col. Gordon. Unfortunately, however, Gordon resigned from his post before landing in India. It was believed that the character and traditions of the Indian Civil Service convinced him (with which evidently he became acquainted more intimately from his preparatory studies for equipping himself for his new responsibility during the voyage) of the stupendous difficulties, if not the utter impossibility, of establishing a righteous and Christian administration in India with such materials and under such influences. This was believed to be his reason for turning back from the very gate of India where he was coming to help the new viceroy. These gossips were widely circulated at the time, and they helped to create favourable prepossessions in regard to the new vicerealty. Besides, Gladstone's Midlothian campaign had also created very large hopes in the political mind in India that the reactionary and repressive measures of the government of Lord Lytton would be reversed by Lord Ripon, who was believed to have been specially commissioned by the Liberal Prime Minister to regain the lost loyalty of the Indian people to the British Power.

Lord Ripon did not take very long to give practical evidence of the new policy which he was charged to initiate. One of the very first measures of the new viceroy was an act repealing Lord Lytton's Vernacular Press Act. It evoked almost universal enthusiasm among our politically-minded. It was hoped that Lord Lytton's Arms Act would also be gradually repealed, as both these acts had found materials to the new premier for his indictment of the previous administration. But while the Vernacular Press Act was repealed, Lord Lytton's Arms Act was allowed to stand on the Statute Book. But this disappointment was soon thrown into the background by other measures of very far-reaching character initiated by the new viceroy, directed towards the gradual evolution of a frankly democratic constitution in British India. Lord Ripon was, I think, the only British viceroy in India who made an honest attempt to translate the principles and ideals of the Queen's Proclamation of 1858 into practical measures of the Indian administration. This was proved by his ill-fated Ilbert Bill. Those Englishmen who may be surprised at the later

developments of political agitations in India might profitably turn to the history of the Ilbert Bill agitation to trace the psychological and moral origin of these. Our people really learnt the A.B.C. of seditious campaign against the government from the agitations organised by their British fellow-subjects in India against the government of Lord Ripon and particularly against the viceroy personally. The Ilbert Bill was intrinsically a very insignificant measure. It was initiated by a minute by B.L. Gupta, an Indian member of the Covenanted Civil Service, one of the first three Bengalees (the other two were Mr. Romesh Chandra Dutt and Mr. Surendra Nath Banerjee) who had successfully competed for it. At that time he was the police magistrate of Calcutta, but owing to his race he was disqualified for trying European British subjects. This disqualification was unjust, and sought to cast a needless discredit and dishonour upon India-born members of the Covenanted Civil Service. They had not only passed a very rigid test on the same terms as the British members of the service, but had spent the very best years of the formative period of their youth in England. Upon their return to their homeland, they practically lived in the same style as their brother civilians, and almost religiously followed the social conventions and the ethical standards of the latter. In those days the India-born civilian practically cut himself off from his parent society, and lived and moved and had his being in the atmosphere so beloved of his British colleagues. In mind and manners he was as much an Englishman as any Englishman. It was no small sacrifice for him, because in this way he completely estranged himself from the society of his own people and became, socially and morally, a pariah among them. He was as much a stranger in his own native land as the European residents in the country. Quite naturally, therefore, the India-born Covenanted Civilian felt keenly the indignity of the invidious distinction which the Criminal Procedure Code made between him and the British members of his service in the matter of presiding over the trial of European British subjects in India when accused of any crime. Mr. B.L. Gupta's minute touched the sensitive conscience of the new viceroy. Sir C.P. Ilbert was then his law member. And a small Bill was introduced

by him in the Viceregal Legislative Council to remove this invidious distinction between Indian and British members of the Covenanted Civil Service. The introduction of this apparently just and inoffensive measure was the signal for a tearing agitation among the European residents in the country, who were literally maddened by this attack on what they believed to be one of their fundamental rights as European British subjects. They offered an open challenge to the authority of the government "by law established in British India," a phrase which has since become familiar to the political history of this country in connection with prosecutions for seditious libels. The government of Lord Ripon suffered all the abuse heaped upon them by the spokesmen of the European community in the country. They even threatened personal violence to the viceroy, declaring that should this measure be persisted in they would even go to the length of capturing by force the person of Her Majesty's representative in India and packing him back to England. With rare Christian forbearance Lord Ripon calmly tolerated all this persecution by his own countrymen in India.

This Ilbert Bill agitation was marked by two incidents that had a far-reaching influence not only upon our political but also upon our social history. One was the speech of Mr Branson, a member of the Calcutta High Court Bar, at Dacca, against this measure. In course of this speech Mr. Branson made a most savage attack upon Indian culture and character citing our mediaeval social institutions of caste, child-marriage, *zenana* seclusion and the prohibition of widow re-marriage as conclusive evidences of our moral degeneration, that branded us with absolute disqualification to sit in judgment upon European criminals. In those days we had no law in British India against the setting of class against class or Mr Branson would have been hauled up for that highly inflammable and offensive speech of his. That speech immediately reacted upon our social reform propaganda, and helped very powerfully to strengthen the hands of our own social reactionaries. Politically, that speech almost immediately provoked a powerful reply delivered in Dacca itself by Mr. Lal Mohan Ghosh. Lal Mohan's refined oratory was more

than equal, even in the strength of its vituperations, to the vulgar exhibitions of Mr Branson. The Ilbert Bill agitation, however, left its mark upon the course of Indian political agitation. It burnt into the mind of the Indian politician the fateful lesson that if India is to protect her liberties and secure an expansion of her legitimate rights, she must initiate as violent an agitation as enabled the European residents in the country to compel the government of Lord Ripon to practically throw out that proposed measure.

Though the Ilbert Bill caused almost wild sensation and roused angry passions in both the communities, the really progressive measures during the viceroyalty of Lord Ripon were his amendment of the Bengal Rent Regulations and his Local Self-Government Act. Lord Cornwallis' Permanent Settlement in Bengal was clearly moved by one single object, namely, to ensure a fixed land revenue and relieve the government of the East India Company of the troubles of collecting it from a large number of individuals enjoying land-tenures. It certainly contributed to develop the agricultural wealth of Bengal to an extent not found in any other Indian province. It saved Bengal from the increasing exactions of periodical settlements that have been one of the causes of the poverty of the other provinces as compared to Bengal. Owing to this Permanent Settlement in Bengal we never had the painful necessity of special measures like, for instance, the Bombay Agricultural Relief Act. The growth of a class of landed aristocracy in Bengal, the majority of whom were Hindus, subject to the Hindu social order of caste, that gave precedence to birth over wealth and enabled oftentimes the poorest members of the community to claim social superiority over the richest of their class, very materially helped to develop a kind of democratic freedom devoid of the degrading class-envy and class-conflict associated with the evolution of democracy in Europe and America. Realised wealth was accumulated in a comparatively few hands, but the ramifications of their social relations covering practically the whole body of the higher castes prevented the use of this wealth to advance this wealthier class to any manner of social and much less economic domination over their fellows. Menial service was rendered by certain castes only. The higher

castes would not stoop to these personal services. They have therefore necessarily to seek their means of living in the service of the government for which they had to qualify themselves with the new education which their British masters had introduced into the country. One of the indirect results of the Permanent Settlement in Bengal has certainly been the premier position which this province attained in the matter of the new English education and modern culture. On the other hand, this Permanent Settlement leading to the accumulation of wealth in large owners of land, very seriously interfered with the growth of industrial and commercial enterprises in the people. Trade inevitably fell into the hands of hereditary castes, who had been condemned from old to a lower social status. And this caste domination stifled the ambition of these trading classes, restricting very seriously their economic enterprise. This Permanent Settlement could not certainly prevent the division of land among an increasingly large class of small landlords and sub-tenure holders, mostly belonging to the higher castes. But the great mass of the agriculturists were placed almost absolutely at the mercy of their landlords, both big and small. This created an anxious agrarian problem. With the gradual development of a sense of personal dignity and liberty, due to the new system of administration of justice established by the British and the reign of law that replaced the old rule of caste and class domination, a clash between the tenants and their landlords became inevitable. This problem had to be solved, and from time to time attempts had been made to indirectly amend Lord Cornwallis' settlement by the imposition of new rural cesses like, for instance, the road cess, on the one side, and the passing of new land legislations, on the other, defining more and more strictly the rights both of the zemindars and their tenants. These, however, were found inadequate to meet the requirements of the situation. They failed to put a stop to the exactions of the zemindars or prevent conflicts between the zemindars and their tenants. A more radical measure for the regulation of the relations between the landlords and the tenants was called for. The Bengal Tenancy Act amendment of Lord Ripon's government was framed to achieve these ends. It was naturally opposed by the

representatives of the zemindary interests in Bengal and Bihar. And though considerably mauled by them in its passage through the Legislature, Lord Ripon's government was able yet to place on the Statute Book a measure of very definite advance towards securing the legitimate rights of the tiller of the soil to the land that he brings under cultivation and nurses to yield considerable produce for the benefit of himself and the community. Since then land tenure in Bengal has received a measure of security which it had not before.

But the most important of the progressive legislations of Lord Ripon's Viceroyalty was his Local Self-Government Act. While the Ilbert Bill wanted to remove an obvious injustice based upon racial discrimination and the new Bengal Tenancy Act sought to advance the legitimate rights of the agriculturist population of Bengal to the land upon which they spent all their labour and substance, Lord Ripon's local self-government scheme was directed towards a more permanent and national objective. Unending subjection of the people of this country to their British political masters had never been the acknowledged aim of British administration in India. From the days of Lord Macaulay British statesmen in charge of Indian affairs had worked, so far as might be consistently, of course, with the protection of their own national interests to train the people of India in the art of parliamentary or representative government which had found its original home in the modern world in Great Britain. This self-government was really built upon institutions of local government worked by the elected representatives of the people. If India was ever to have a system of government similar to that obtaining in the British Isles and also in the British colonies, then the foundations of it would have to be laid deep and strong in institutions of local self-government. Lord Ripon clearly realised this. The Indian intelligentsia, particularly the leaders of the new political thought in Bengal, had already raised the cry of self-government or parliamentary or representative government as the goal of their political endeavour. Though this political awakening was confined at the time to the rising generation of educated intellectuals, the masses were slowly but surely coming into line with them; and if the British connection with India were to endure, the political

aspirations of the people must be satisfied by timely reconstruction of the system of government in this great dependency. Lord Ripon clearly recognised all this with the instinct of the far-seeing statesman, and he promulgated a resolution proposing to build up by degrees a modern system of local self-government upon which gradually the stately structure of democratic national self-government might be reared. Lord Ripon thought not in the terms of the actual state of political consciousness and education of the people but in the terms of the still distant future when the ripples of the new consciousness would grow and gather strength and volume and render a radical change in the system of Indian government imperative and inevitable. But unfortunately lack of vision and far-seeing statesmanship in those upon whom, as a matter of course, the practical working of Lord Ripon's scheme fell, prevented us from reaping the results of it. Nearly forty years after, the Montagu-Chelmsford report had, therefore, to frankly confess that the ideal towards which Lord Ripon wanted his scheme to move was sacrificed in its working to the demands of practical efficiency. The educational object was lost sight of in the pursuit of immediate administrative efficiency, and institutions of local self-government established under Lord Ripon came to be dominated by the all-absorbing British bureaucracy in the country depriving the people of those educative opportunities which Lord Ripon had wanted to offer them through his Local Self-Government Act. The tedious process of educating the people of this country in the unfamiliar methods of rural and municipal self-government was not liked by the impatient members of the Indian Civil Service, who deliberately usurped the powers that were meant to be transferred gradually to the representatives of the people; and Lord Ripon's self-government measure inevitably came to be treated with contempt as 'local slough'. But though it failed in its practical working owing to obvious reasons, the farsight and liberal spirit of its author must be frankly acknowledged and recorded by the historian of Lord Ripon's viceroyalty in India.

That Viceroyalty, though not directly responsible for it, was incidentally associated with another movement that had a profound influence upon the evolution of Indian history and politics during

the half-a-century that has elapsed since his lordship left the Indian shores. It was about 1880 or 1881 that Djemal ed Din, the founder of the Pan-Islamic movement, came from Afghanistan to India, and had confidential conversations with the leaders of the Mahomedan community in this country. He came to Calcutta and met the late Nawab Abdul Latiff and the small group of educated Mahomedans associated with him, including the late Justice Ameer Ali, and inoculated them with the virus of his Pan-Islamism. Before Djemal ed Din's advent the educated Indian Mahomedans, particularly in Bengal, had been loyally co-operating with their Hindu fellow-subjects for the common advancement of national political interests. But after his visit they commenced to draw themselves away from the political activities of their Hindu fellow-subjects until gradually a wide gulf was created between the Hindu and the Moslem intellectuals in the country in regard to our national endeavours.

Lord Ripon was the most popular viceroy that India had. His popularity, however, was more due to his personal character and piety than perhaps to even the liberal policy which he tried to initiate or his far-seeing statesmanship. This last, no doubt, contributed very materially to allay the popular discontent created by the acts and policies of the Lytton administration. But these alone would hardly have been sufficient to earn for him that enthusiastic and almost affectionate regard which became manifest in the unprecedented demonstration that marked his departure from India. Both in Calcutta and Bombay impressive farewell functions were held in which all classes of the community joined. He was the only viceroy who received the unique distinction of being voted a statute practically by the educated Indian community only. The farewell demonstrations held in his honour compelled the *Pioneer*, the spokesman of the European community in India, to ask in a remarkable article: 'If It Be Real, What Does It Mean?' The article was anonymous, but was believed at that time to have been written by Mr A.O. Hume, who was then Chief Secretary to the Government of India, and who upon his retirement from office helped to initiate the historic movement of the Indian National Congress.

Lord Ripon belonged to that old generation of British administrators in India who honestly believed in England's mission in this continent. That mission was to help an ancient and decadent people to a rejuvenascent national life under modern conditions. No British statesman could desire the break-up of India's British connection, neither did Lord Ripon. But he saw that if England's connection with India was to endure it could only be through the complete reconciliation of India's natural desire for national autonomy with the British connection. The British colonies enjoyed practical self-government. This colonial self-government was therefore the objective for which British statesmen of the class of Lord Ripon deliberately and sincerely strove. The dominion ideal had not as yet dawned upon the consciousness of Imperial statesmanship. That was revealed towards the close of the last century in the light of the experiences of the Boer War. But those who knew Lord Ripon cannot possibly doubt it that had he lived to this day his far-sighted statesmanship would have recognised the safety of the British Empire in India in the admission of this great dependency into the Commonwealth of Nations composing the white members of that empire upon terms of absolute equality with the other members of it. And frankly accepting this objective Lord Ripon would have steadily worked for the education of the Indian people to qualify themselves for their legitimate place in the Federation of Free States wherein the present British Empire must seek and find its permanent safety and ultimate destiny. Lord Ripon's Indian policy has been interpreted in some quarters as prompted more by cunning diplomacy than by honest regard for India's legitimate political freedom in the modern world. It did, no doubt, help to strengthen and prolong the hypnotic spell which the British had cast over our people. But those who knew Lord Ripon personally could find no support for this suspicion in his mind and character. And history must give to the most popular Viceroy that India had a high place among the makers, politically, of modern India. The immediate result of India's awakening under Lord Ripon was the birth of the Indian National Congress about a year after he retired from the Indian viceroyalty.

Chapter 22

HINDU RELIGIOUS REVIVAL AND SOCIAL REACTION

At the close of 1882, I found myself again in Calcutta. I came from Bangalore, as I have said, to take charge of the education of the two younger sons and the third daughter of Babu Durga Mohan Das. Upon my arrival, however, I found, though in an honorary capacity, more congenial occupation along with that of private tutor, as assistant to the editor of the *Bengal Public Opinion*. The *Bengal Public Opinion* was under a new name really the old *Brahmo Public Opinion* started as the official organ of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. The *Brahmo Public Opinion* was a general newspaper and review with a few columns specially devoted to the news of the Brahmo Samaj and the discussion of topics of special interest to the Brahmo community. It was very largely patronised by the advanced sections of educated Bengalees, and men like the late Mr Nagendra Nath Ghose, better known as Mr N.N. Ghose, Barrister-at-Law and Principal of the Metropolitan Institution, were regular contributors to the columns of this paper. From the very first it became the organ in politics of the most advanced democratic ideals in this country. During the amendment of the Bengal land or rent law, the *Brahmo Public Opinion* took up the cause of the ryots as against the vested interests of the zemindars and lent its influential support to Lord Ripon's policy as embodied in the new Rent Bill. When first started, the *Brahmo Public Opinion* was financed by Babu Durga Mohan Das and Mr Ananda Mohan Bose. But it did not satisfy the so-called religious needs of the Brahmo community. The ideal of this paper, under Babu Bhuvan Mohan Das, was more liberal and rational than what was liked by the general

body of Brahmos, still obsessed by mediaeval notions about religious life and duty. To Babu Bhuban Mohan Das, as it was also to his elder brother Durga Mohan, religion was not merely a matter of the culture of the emotions or of mere prayers and adorations to the Deity. Religion, and particularly the religion which the modern man especially needed, was something that covered every department of man's personal life and social duties, including his duties towards the state or his political duties and obligations. Among the earlier teachers of the Brahmo Samaj none counted higher than the American Unitarian Minister Theodore Parker. Parker's *Sermons* were in a somewhat special sense the scripture of our new religion. And the ideal of the more advanced and rational section of the Brahmo Samaj, the section which was more largely represented in the Sadharana Brahmo Samaj, was that set up in the first of these Sermons, headed 'Solid Piety'. 'The harmonious development of all the faculties of our manhood' was the soul and essence of his ideal of 'Solid Piety'. But there were men among us in the Brahmo Samaj, who favoured the ideal of the old and orthodox devotional, or contemplative and emotional life more than the life of active service of God through service of man and the simultaneous cultivation of all our faculties, our reason, our conscience or the social sense, our emotions and our will with a view to reach out to the most perfect type of manhood. Keshub Chunder Sen had already developed the tendency to advance the emotional side of religion to the more or less open neglect of its rational and practical side. And even among those who had rebelled against Keshub's authority in the Samaj and had joined the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, there were not a few, especially among the elders, whose partiality for mediaeval religious ideals was open and emphatic. They did not quite favour the *Brahmo Public Opinion* as the official organ of the Samaj. They wanted a more pronounced Brahmo propagandist than what the *Brahmo Public Opinion* seemed to be in their eyes. Even Pandit Shivanath Shastri had commenced slowly and imperceptibly to shed his earlier rationalism; and what he was before the schism as editor of the *Samadarshee*, he no longer was as minister and missionary of

the Sadharana Brahmo Samaj. He too felt that the *Brahmo Public Opinion* was not sufficiently "religious and spiritual" to continue to be the official organ of the Samaj. Mr. Ananda Mohan Bose also lent his support to this view. And the result was that the *Brahmo Public Opinion* ceased from the beginning of 1883 to be the organ of the Brahmo Samaj. The *Indian Messenger* succeeded it in this office, with Pandit Shivanath Shastri as its formal editor. The *Brahmo Public Opinion* changed its name into *Bengal Public Opinion* with Babu Bhuban Mohan Das as editor, and the two brothers, Durga Mohan and Bhuban Mohan, undertook the financial responsibility of it. It was on this paper, upon my return to Calcutta from Bangalore at the beginning of 1883 that I found my first regular training in English journalism. Though Babu Bhuban Mohan was its editor, within a few weeks of my joining it I became practically the chief writer on its staff and gradually the editorial function also came into my charge without editorial responsibility.

When in 1879 I left the university and went to Cuttack, the Brahmo Samaj was still a great intellectual and moral force in the country. Middle-nineteenth century rationalism and individualism of European culture were still the dominating ideas in the life and evolution of modern Bengal. But the conflict of political interests between the new generation of English-educated Indians and the British officialdom in the country, and the more fundamental cultural conflict between European modernism and Indian mediaevalism soon provoked a revolt against this foreign domination in the wake of which rapidly followed a new national self-consciousness which, in the first flush of its recently found pride of race and culture, commenced to repudiate whatever was foreign, irrespective of the intrinsic reason and value of it, and set up a defence even of those social institutions and religious and spiritual tendencies that had previously been openly repudiated as false and harmful. Many things contributed to this reaction. The revival of mediaevalism in the Brahmo Samaj itself was certainly by no means the least powerful of these. In 1876 or thereabout Col. Olcott and Madame Blavatsky landed at Bombay with a new message and a new mission. And the

Theosophical Society which they founded was perhaps the most powerful of the forces that brought in this movement of Hindu religious revival and social reaction. This society told our people that instead of having any reason to be ashamed of their past or of the legacies left to them by it, they had every reason to feel justly proud of it all, because their ancient seers and saints had been the spokesmen of the highest truths and their old books, so woefully misunderstood today, had been the repositories of the highest human illumination and wisdom. Our people had hitherto felt perpetually humiliated at the sense of their degradation. This new message, coming from the representatives of the most advanced peoples of the modern world, the inheritors of the most advanced culture and civilisation the world has as yet known, at once raised us in our own estimation and created a self-confidence in us that commenced to find easy expression in a new propaganda which, instead of apologising for our current and mediaeval ideas and institutions and seeking to reform and reconstruct these after modern European ideals, boldly stood up in defence of them.

In Bengal this movement of Hindu religious revival and Hindu social apologetics and reaction found expression through the school of Bankim Chandra on the one side, whose new organ was the small propagandist monthly, the *Prachar*, and through the school of Pandit Shashadhar Tarkachudamani, who soon found a ready-made organ in the popular Bengali weekly, the *Bangabasee*. Other schools also, more or less identified with either the line of Bankim Chandra or of Pandit Shashadhar, were fast springing up under the inspiration of this new revivalist and reactionary thought. Foremost among these was the *Navajeevana* started and edited by Babu Akshay Chandra Sarkar. All these new organs, more or less, followed the line of propaganda of the Brahmo Samaj. Bankim Chandra openly attempted a 'reexplanation, a reinterpretation and a readjustment' of our old theology and ethics in the light of the most advanced modern thought and in accordance with the new rules of literary criticism and scriptural interpretation that had been so powerfully influencing current religious life and thought in Christendom itself.

In this work of reexplanation, reinterpretation and readjustment, Bankim Chandra very closely followed the canons of Renan in his studies of the life of Jesus and the early history of Christianity. Bankim Chandra followed, or more correctly closely imitated, Renan in his presentation of Shree Krishna. Like Renan, who had formed in his mind a picture of the spiritual ideals presented through the Gospel narratives and then applied this picture of Christ to critically examine the Gospel narratives themselves, accepting as true only such portions of these narratives as seemed to be in consonance with his own fancy picture, and rejecting as false and spurious additions all those things in these narratives that were inconsistent with this picture of the character of the Master, Bankim Chandra also first formed in his own mind a picture of Shree Krishna as the Ideal Man; he applied this picture to his examination of the Krishna legend current among our people, and rejected everything that did not harmonise with it. Bankim Chandra's *Anusheelana Dharma* was really the Brahmo Samaj ideal of what Theodore Parker called 'Solid Piety', the ideal, namely of the harmonious development of all the faculties of man, physical and mental, through his personal and social life, and he preached it only without the unpopular Brahmo name. Akshay Chandra Sarkar through his *Navajeevana* presented a somewhat different line of Hindu apologetics and exegeses. While Bankim Chandra was more critical and rational or logical, Akshay Chandra was more emotional. Bankim Chandra followed more or less in the footsteps of our old Mimamsakas, like Jaimini for instance, or more correctly like Badarayana in his *Brahma-Sutras*, Akshay Chandra followed the Bhaktivada schools and laid greater emphasis on the direct realisations of saints and seers, both ancient and modern. But both were high-priests of the movement of Neo-Hinduism and social reaction that followed as a protest against the pretensions of aggressive Christian propaganda and more particularly against the cultural domination of the 'stranger within our gate', who had captured the machinery of our state and administration.

All these revivals and reactions were more directly the fruit of the previous movement of religious and social revolt led by the Brahmo Samaj itself. In this sense, they were not merely destructive of the Brahmo propaganda but also, at the same time, partially corrective of and supplementary to it. Most, if not all the protagonists of this new Hindu religious revival and social reaction had been in their early life connected with the Brahmo Samaj. And the new revival movement that openly declared war upon all the fundamental progressive ideals of the Brahmo Samaj, whether consciously or unconsciously, practically took up the cause of modern religious and social reconstruction in Bengal at the point where the Brahmo Samaj had already brought it. Religious ritualism, though sought to be defended by pseudo science, such as was found in the exegeses and apologetics of Pandit Shashadhar Tarkachudamani and the Theosophists, practically initiated a new movement of inner spiritual and religious culture which was distinct from all outer rituals and formularies. Hinduism in my boyhood was almost exclusively a personal religion with a social aspect that was organised in the festivities of the external *pujas*. The only form of what might deserve to be called congregational worship was found in the Vaishnava *keertanas* and in the Vaishnava *mahotsavas*. The higher and the more educated classes had no participation in these. It was the Brahmo Samaj which first introduced congregational worship in modern India. With this Hindu revival and reaction, *Hari Sabhas* commenced to grow up everywhere which inaugurated a kind of congregational worship. At the meetings of these *sabhas*, scripture texts were read and expounded by some Pandit and hymns or *bhajans* were sung. All this was clearly a reproduction of the Brahmo mode of worship. Indeed, this was originally what Raja Ram Mohan wanted to be the form of Divine Worship in his Brahmo Samaj. He advised the reading and exposition of sacred texts for the mental worship of the Supreme Being. But while this revival and reaction movement adopted or adapted the spirit and even the form of Brahmo Samaj religion and worship, it stood up violently against the social idealism of the Brahmo movement. It was really here in its social gospel and in its war

upon caste and custom that denied to man on account of his birth or heritage his rights as man and a social being, that the Brahmo Samaj struck at the very life of the old Hindu social hierarchy. This social reaction, therefore, put up a most determined opposition to the Brahmo movement.

This revival and reactionary propaganda in the periodical press was very powerfully supplemented by the new Bengalee stage. While Bankim Chandra's *Prachar* and Akshay Babu's *Navajeevana* tried to combat Brahmo rationalism by argument, the Bengali stage sought to kill the social idealism of it by satire and ridicule. The readers of *Prachar* and *Navajeevana* could be counted only in three figures but those who crowded the Calcutta theatres week after week numbered thousands. They were hardly an educated or discriminating audience. They enjoyed the vulgar ribaldries of the actors and actresses who represented Brahmo men and women on the stage. All this created a very violent antagonism to the Brahmo Samaj about the time when I found myself once more in Calcutta. And I was soon drawn into this new fight for faith and freedom against reactionary forces let loose about us.

When Bankim Chandra started his *Prachar* and Akshay Chandra his *Navajeevana* a few young men of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj started a small monthly, the *Alochana*. Though not formally its editor, I was practically called upon to share the bulk of the work and responsibility of the editorial chair. A few rupees were collected from a few friends to meet the initial outlay. Lady Jagadish Chandra Bose, before her marriage Miss Abala Das, as she was then known, who was then reading for a medical degree at Madras, helped us with a little money. Babu Paresh Nath Sen, who subsequently entered the Educational Service of the Government in Bengal and retired on a pension from the chair of English literature in the Bethune College, was another of the helpers or proprietors, if this term may be applied to people who had no pecuniary or indeed any other interests in this paper and whose only motive was just to see an organ of advanced social and religious ideas and ideals in current Bengalee periodical literature that would try to offer some corrective, however feeble,

to the growing forces of religious and social reaction in the country. The *Alochana* was able to secure contributions from such eminent Bengalee writers as Raj Narayan Bose, Shivanath Shastri; and I think both Dvijendra Nath and Rabindra Nath, though they had their own family monthly the *Sadhana*, occasionally contributed to the pages of this new paper as a public acknowledgment of their sympathy with the cause which it had so courageously espoused against such tremendous odds, both financial and intellectual. Babu Gagan Chandra Home was the managing editor. He looked both after its business side as well as its literary side also. *Alochana* did not live long, it ceased publication after about a couple of years, probably within that period. But it did help, as long as it lived, to keep the flag of progressive thought and rational life flying.

Upon my return to Calcutta in 1882, I found a new development in Bengalee journalism. During my sojourn in far away Bangalore, a new Bengalee weekly had come into being, which exerted very considerable influence over current life and thought in our province for nearly quarter of a century. It was the *Bangabasee*. When it was first started, the Brahmo Samaj was still a force in Bengalee thought and life. Shivanath Shastri, Dwarka Nath Gangulee, Umesh Chandra Datta, editor of *Bharat-Sanskarak* and *Bamabodhinee*, these prominent Brahmos belonging to the Sadharana Samaj, were all Bengalee writers of established reputation. The proprietor of the *Bangabasee*, wanting to publish a first class Bengalee weekly, could not think of it without them as regular contributors. So he approached them all and they all readily offered their help and cooperation in this new journalistic venture. Babu Jnanendra Lal Roy was the first editor of this paper. Jnanendra Lal, though not a professed Brahmo, had genuine regard for the cause which the Brahmo Samaj represented. Owing to him and these Brahmo contributors the *Bangabasee* became a powerful organ of liberal thought in Bengal. But this was not continued for very long. Babu Jogendra Chandra Bose, the proprietor of the *Bangabasee*, himself had no especial predilection for Brahmo liberalism. His aim was to unite all the best intellects of Bengal in his weekly

with a view to make it the most popular journal in the province. As he approached therefore men of advanced social views like Shivanath Shastri and Dwarka Nath Ganguly to write in his paper, so he invited contributions also from eminent social reactionaries like Chandra Nath Bose and Indra Nath Banerjee. Chandra Nath had secured by his 'Sakuntala-tattwa', an attempt at a psychological study of the world-renowned production of Kalidasa, a very high place among Bengalee writers as an essayist and literary critic. Indra Nath leapt to fame as a remarkable satirist by his *Bharatoddhar*. He turned his shafts on the ideals of female emancipation of the Brahmo Samaj. An exceedingly offensive attack on educated Brahmo ladies appeared one day in the *Bangabasee*. Babu Dwarka Nath Gangulee immediately demanded a public recantation and apology for it from the *Bangabasee*. This was refused with the result that the Brahmo contributors of the *Bangabasee* boycotted it at once, and in a few days started a Bengalee weekly of their own, the *Sanjibanee*, with a view to counter the pernicious influence, from their point of view, of the *Bangabasee*. This open breach with the Brahmo Samaj instead of weakening the growing popularity of the *Bangabasee* helped materially to increase it and soon converted it into an organ of the most hidebound conservatism, both theological and social, of the Bengalee Hindu society. The *Sanjibanee's* influence was more or less confined to the members of the Brahmo Samaj and their sympathisers. It was this division which gradually drove the *Bangabasee* to an extreme position on the side of Hindu orthodoxy on the one hand, while it drove the *Sanjibanee* also to the other extreme of Brahmo orthodoxy. Contemporary Bengalee thought and life, divided practically into these two camps, was thus deprived of reasonable reconciliation and synthesis in which alone these conflicts of ideals could possibly find their final settlement and solution. The movement of social and religious progress represented by the Brahmo Samaj suffered most seriously, at least for the time being, on account of this separation and conflict. Practically, the whole decade, 1880 to 1890, was marked by a strong current of religious revival and

social reaction, which positively set back the movement of progress not only in Bengal but all over India.

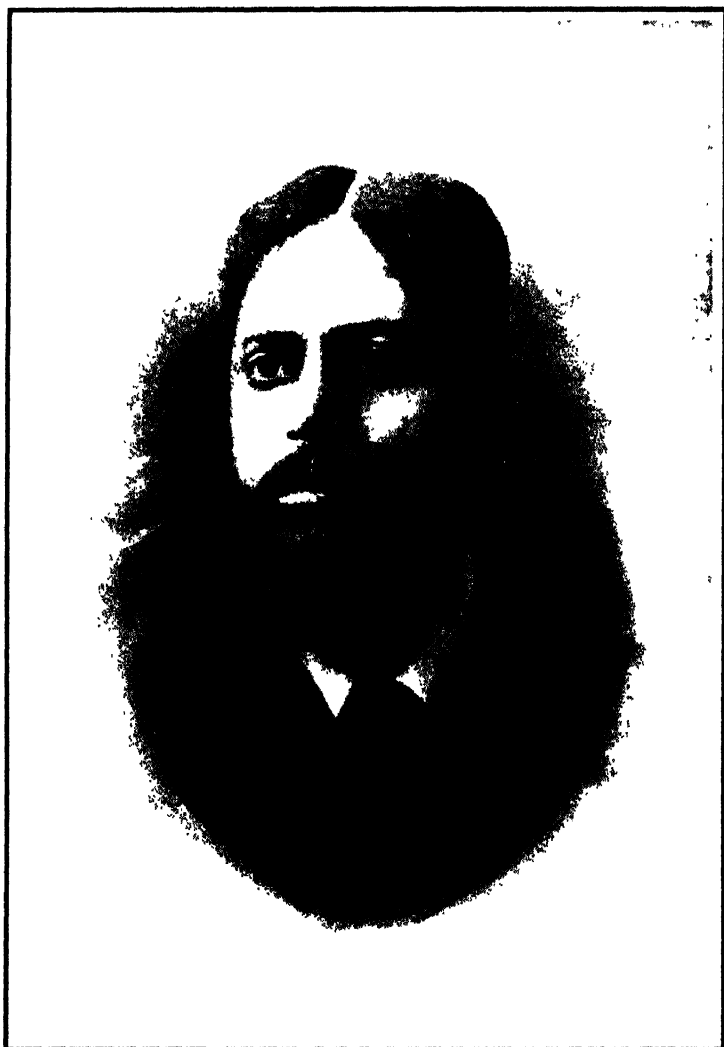
These years (1880 to 1890) were also marked by the birth of a new political conflict, which was initiated first by the ill-fated Ilbert Bill. In 1883 Surendra Nath was sentenced to simple imprisonment, on the civil side of the jail, for two months on a charge of contempt of court. It arose out of certain criticisms of the conduct of one of the High Court judges, Mr. Justice Norris, who had ordered to be produced before him for examination the Hindu religious symbol or ikon, the *Salagram*. This matter was first brought to public notice by the *Bengal Public Opinion*. Surendra Nath had already acquired the *Bengalee*, and was its responsible editor. Commenting upon the information published in the *Bengal Public Opinion*, the *Bengalee* wrote that "we have now however amongst us a judge who, if he does not actually recall to mind the days of Jeffrys and Scroggs, has certainly done enough within the short time that he has filled the High Court Bench to show how unworthy he is of the high office and how by nature he is unfitted to maintain those traditions of dignity which are inseparable from the office of judge of the highest court in the land." These remarks were prompted by the following paragraph of the *Bengal Public Opinion*:

Mr Justice Norris is determined to set the Hughly on fire. The last act of *zuburdusti* on his lordship's part was the bringing of a *salagram*, a stone idol, into court for identification. There have been very many cases both in the late Supreme Court and the present High Court of Calcutta regarding the custody of Hindu idols but the presiding deity of a Hindu household had never before this the honour of being dragged into the Court. Our Calcutta Daniel looked at the idol and said that it could not be a hundred years old. So Mr Justice Norris is not only versed in Law and Medicine, but is also a connoisseur of Hindu idols. It is difficult to say what he is not. Whether the orthodox Hindus of Calcutta will tamely submit to their family idols being dragged into Court is a matter for them to decide, but it does seem to us that some

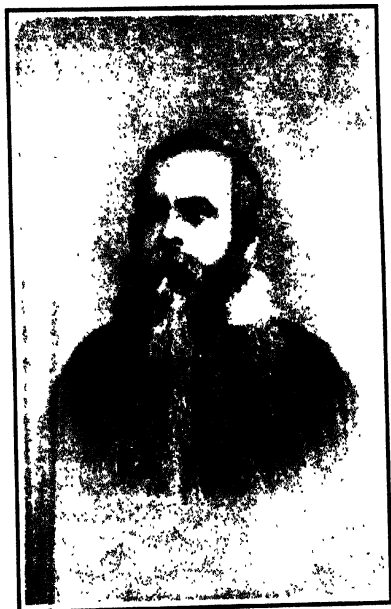
public steps should be taken to put a quietus to the wild eccentricities of this young and raw Dispenser of Justice.

Surendra Nath's imprisonment called forth the first real political demonstration all over Bengal. He had already become the idol of the younger generation of his countrymen. His conviction and sentence was taken up by Young Bengal as an open challenge to their national honour and an attack on their love of freedom and patriotism. Crowded meetings were held not only in Calcutta but practically all over Bengal to express sympathy with him. Upon his release from prison Surendra Nath made an extensive tour in Bengal and Upper India collecting contributions to a permanent fund called the National Fund, which was to be devoted to the new political propaganda. The idea of this fund, so far as I remember, originated with Babu Tarapada Banerjee, who was at that time practising in the District Court at Krishnagar. He published an appeal for this fund in the columns of the *Bengalee*, when Surendra Nath was still in jail. The amount collected came to about Rs. 20,000, and the subscribers at a meeting decided to make it over to the Indian Association of Calcutta for the promotion of political work.

The political movement in Bengal, started mainly through the inspiring propaganda of Surendra Nath and Ananda Mohan, had from the beginning an all-India outlook. The Indian Association worked for building up something like an Indian Parliament with its constituencies spread all over the continent. With this idea branches of the Indian Association, as already mentioned, were organised in every important town and city not only in Bengal but in Upper India from Allahabad to Amritsar. Surendra Nath's imprisonment helped forward this movement of Indian unity very considerably. It was, as Ananda Mohan wrote in the report of the Indian Association, a real blessing in disguise. "It has now been demonstrated," he said, "by the universal outburst of grief and indignation which the event called forth, that the people of the different Indian provinces have learnt to feel for one another, and that a common bond of unity and fellow-feeling is rapidly being established among them." The necessary sequence of this



ANANDA MOHAN BOSE.



DURGA MOHAN DAS.



BHUBAN MOHAN DAS.

new national consciousness was the first National Conference which was held in Calcutta in 1883—December 28 to 30—in the Albert Hall. It was presided over, if my memory fails me not, by the Rev. K.M. Banerjee. So far as Bengal was concerned the two prominent political groups, one representing the landed aristocracy of the province, the British Indian Association, and the other representing the growing power of the educated middle class, the Indian Association, were united at this conference. There were delegates not only from the different towns in Bengal but also from Upper India, about one hundred in all, and as Ananda Mohan remarked in course of his opening speech, “it was the first stage towards a National Parliament”. The reform and expansion of the legislative councils as instruments of democratic self-government, the promotion of general and technical education, the separation of judicial from the executive functions in the administration of criminal justice, and the larger employment of Indians in the administration of their country—these were the main demands put forward at this conference. They were practically the same as found expression through the Indian National Congress that met in Bombay in 1885. I was present at this conference, though rather too young to take any part in its deliberations.

The year 1884, as already noticed, was marked by a very strong wave of social reaction that passed not only over Calcutta but almost all over Bengal. In Calcutta the protagonists of this movement were Pandit Sashadhar Tarkachudamani, who held many meetings in defence of popular Hindu ceremonialism and image worship and current Hindu social institutions. Pandit Sashadhar, however, did not follow the lines of the old exegeses and apologetics of Hinduism or the ancient *mimansakas* and their later interpreters. But he adopted altogether a new line of apologetics. The old *mimansas* worked upon the postulate of scriptural authority. The scriptures, and particularly the Vedas, were believed to be eternal. They were not the product of any person, they were *apaurusheya*. The old *mimansakas* had tried so to interpret these terms and these claims that they might be reconciled with our ordinary reason. Their final conclusion was

expressed in what may be called the Hindu doctrine of logos or logoi. Words, they declared, were of two kinds, namely, those that were composed of sounds and those that represented eternal ideas. The terms for these two kinds of words in Sanskrit were *dhvanyatmaka* and *sphotatmaka*. These *sphota saudas* meant exactly the same thing as the ideas or archetypes or logoi of early Greek speculation. The Vedas to which were attributed eternal existence and supernatural scriptural authority were confined only to those parts of them that expressed or related to these *sphota saudas* or archetypes, from which all creation evolved. Pandit Sashadhar Tarkachudamani, however, did not follow the ancient Vedic exegeses and apologetics. He was concerned with the defence not of ancient Vedic religion but of current Puranic rituals. Nor could an appeal to ancient scriptures carry any weight with the generation with whom the Pandit had to deal in Bengal. His mission was among modern educated Bengalees. They had lost all faith in supernatural scriptures. Their mind was saturated with modern rationalism. They had commenced to think in the terms of 20th century scientific thought. Pandit Sashadhar Tarkachudamani therefore adopted a new line of interpretation seeking to reconcile ancient Hindu ritualism and mediaeval Hindu faith with modern science. The interpretation was as true or as false as that offered by the defenders of popular Christianity seeking to reconcile it with the advanced researches and discoveries of modern science. It was really neither honest faith nor correct science. But all the same it went down with large numbers of our countrymen who cared little for their faith and understood less of what they pretended to know of science. Sashadhar Tarkachudamani could not commend himself even to Hindu revivalists like Bankim Chandra, who refused to lend his approval to his propaganda.

This new revival movement had another powerful protagonist in Shree Krishna Prasanna Sen. He had the gift of oratory in a much larger measure than Sashadhar Tarkachudamani. He had the power to rouse popular sentiments by vulgar witticism and through playing upon words. One of his most popular presentations of the superiority of Hinduism was a pun on the

words God in English representing the Supreme Being and *Nanda-Nandana* in Sanskrit and Bengalee, representing the Vaishnavic Deity Shree Krishna. "If you reversed the alphabets composing the word God you would find it converted into dog; if you reversed the letters *Nanda-Nandana* in this way you would find no change in it." This was a typical presentation of Shree Krishna Prasanna Sen. He was sentimental, vulgar and abusive, but this very sentimentality, vulgarity and abuse went down with a generation of half-educated Bengalees who had been wounded in their tenderest spots by the vulgarities of the Anglo-Indian politicals of the type of Branson and ignorant and unimaginative Christian propagandists.

Akshay Chandra Sarkar was perhaps the most powerful opponent of progressive social views represented by not only the Brahmo Samaj but even by such advanced Hindu social reformers as Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar. Babu Akshay Chandra delivered an address in defence of the disabilities imposed by Hinduism upon young widows in regard to remarriage about the middle of 1884 before a large and distinguished audience. The meeting was held under the auspices of the Savitree Library. It was presided over, I think, by Dr. Gurudas Banerjee, who subsequently rose to the position of a puisne judge in our High Court and was knighted in recognition of his distinguished services. I was then sub-editor of the *Bengal Public Opinion*. I had been relieved from the beginning of 1884 of the charge of Durga Mohan Babu's sons, who went to the new Civil Service classes opened by Dr. Aghore Nath Chattopadhyaya, who had been deported from Hyderabad (Nizam) a few months earlier, in consequence of some political intrigue, which was so common in our native states, and had come and settled in Calcutta. I was present at this meeting and, though comparatively young and unknown, I did not hesitate to take up the challenge of the veteran Bengalee essayist. My speech in opposition to Babu Akshay Chandra Sarkar's attracted considerable notice not only at the meeting but also in the periodical press of that time. I reproduced a summary of it in our monthly, *Alochana*. This was practically my first appearance before a large and distinguished Calcutta audience.

For some time, however, the Bengalee community of Calcutta, if not indeed of the whole of Bengal, was very considerably agitated over the controversy of this period between the representatives of Neo-Hinduism and the spokesmen of the Brahmo Samaj. Babu Nagendra Nath Chatterjee represented the Brahmo standpoint; while Pandit Sashadhar Tarkachudamani and Shree Krishna Prasanna Sen represented the forces of Hindu religious revival and social reaction. Babu Nagendra Nath delivered a series of lectures in defence of the theology of the Brahmo Samaj and its social ideals. These were delivered to large audiences at one of the Calcutta theatres, and were subsequently published in book form under the title of 'Dharma-Jijnasa'. Babu Nagendra Nath was one of the most powerful Bengalee speakers of his day. Not an orator like Keshub Chunder Sen or Shivanath Shastri, Nagendra Nath, however, drew always crowded houses by the fascination of his wit and the incisive logic of his discourses. His 'Dharma-Jijnasa', or inquiry into religion, is one of the best books of its kind not only in Bengalee but perhaps even in English. It establishes what the students of philosophy call the 'logic of thought'. Though it follows the essential lines of European theistic philosophy and theology of the last century, the presentation is certainly original. The fundamental issue in this controversy between the position of the Brahmo Samaj on the one side and that of the Neo-Hinduism of Sashadhar Tarkachudamani and Shree Krishna Prasanna Sen on the other, was regarding the nature of God. Is God with or without form?—*Iswar sakara* or *nirakara*? Both sides accepted that God has no form. He is *nirakara* or without form. But can man in the present stage of his mental and spiritual evolution truly conceive of the formless God or worship Him as such? The whole issue was false. As regards the worship of the formless God, *Samkara Bhashya* or the commentary of Samkara on the Vedanta has an exhaustive examination of it. According to Samkara there are three ways of knowing the Absolute or Brahman. One is through direct cognition called *aparokshanubhuti* in Sanskrit. This is the only and real way to the realisation of Brahman. But few, very few indeed, are qualified to pursue this way, which requires absolute abstraction

of the mind and understanding from all sense activities and consequently the cessation even of the ordinary processes of intellection. This highest and truest worship of Brahman is possible therefore in that beatific state which is known to Indian experience as *samadhi*. Those who have not acquired this state of beatitude cannot therefore worship God really 'in spirit and in truth'. The Samkara-Vedanta, however, mentions two other forms of Divine worship. One is called *sampadopashana*, and the other *prateekopashana*. *Sampadopashana* means the contemplation of Brahman through something that bears some analogy to Him. The worship of Brahman through the Sun belongs to this category. The Sun in revealing the world reveals itself. The Sun is therefore both self-revealing or *svaprakasha* and world-revealing or *jagatprakashaka*. If we concentrate our mind upon these two essential qualities of the Sun, and through such contemplation try to worship Brahman through the Sun-symbol, such worship is called worship through analogy or *sampadopashana*. This certainly has a place in what may be called the progressive realisation of Brahman 'in spirit and in truth'. But in the early eighties of the last century, our people had hardly any knowledge of the *Shareeraka Bhashya*, and neither Pandit Sashadhar nor Pandit Shree Krishna Prasanna seemed to have had any knowledge of these old Hindu exegetics. Their position was practically an agnostic position: Brahman is unknown and unknowable. In the present stage of our evolution, it is absolutely futile for us to pretend to know and worship Brahman. Our ancient seers and sages realised it and therefore they prescribed physical, psychophysical, mental and social or ethical disciplines for the purification of our mind and body. And this object, when attained, would qualify us for the worship of Brahman. Till then we must follow the way of the ancient seers and accept the disciplines prescribed by them. Current Hinduism consists only of these preliminary disciplines, and the pursuit of the popular rituals of the Hindu religion is the only law for ordinary men and women. Babu Nagendra Nath attacked this position of Neo-Hindu revivalists from the standpoint of the prevailing rationalism and the theistic theology of middle 19th century European thought.

His defence of progressive Brahmo thought therefore failed to seriously influence the forces of revival and reaction. It did not offer really any solution of the fundamental problem of theism, namely, the problem of the Personality of the Absolute. That came later, though not however fully, with the revival of the study of the Philosophy of the Absolute in the light of the realisations of Bengal Vaishnavism or the School of Shree Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

Chapter 23

THE TRIUMPH OF FATHER LOVE



In 1884 I was Sub-Editor of the *Bengal Public Opinion*. My allowance was Rs. 70 a month. This was not sufficient to meet the requirements of a growing family. My eldest daughter was born in March 1883 In November 1885 my second daughter was born. All through 1884 I tried to make a little extra income by contributions to Bengali papers. The *Bharat-Mihir* had transferred itself from Mymensingh to Calcutta about this time and it commenced to take regular contributions from me for which, on an average, I got from Rs. 20 to Rs. 25 a month. Even after the other Brahmo writers had cut off all connection with the *Bangabasee* I continued to write for it for two reasons: one was that I was in need of money, and the other was that through the columns of this paper I could reach a much larger circle of readers than any other Bengalee weekly of those days. There was yet another reason why I did not give up the *Bangabasee*, and that was this, namely, that I could not entirely fall in with the spirit of the *Sanjibanee*, which seemed to me to be as dogmatic and hidebound in its own way as any organ of Hindu revival and social reaction. The *Bangabasee* accepted whatever I wrote, did not interfere in any way with the freest expression of my thoughts and opinions. But the *Sanjibanee* did not allow the same degree of freedom to those who were not on the editorial board. The editorial board of the *Sanjibanee* consisted of Babu Krishna Kumar Mitra, Babu Heramba Chandra Maitra and Babu Kali Sankar Sukul, and I could never completely fall in with the Brahmo orthodoxy of these friends. And the *Bangabasee* paid me liberally according to the standard of those days, while the *Sanjibanee*

paid nothing to its contributors, pleading poverty for this inability. Towards the fall of 1884 the *Bengal Public Opinion* practically ceased publication, being incorporated with Surendra Nath's *Bengalee*, and I lost the greater portion of my income in consequence of it. From August 1884 onward I was struggling with my growing family and my decreasing income in Calcutta.

Two or three friends came to my help about this time. They were studying in the university. They came from my native district of Sylhet and they offered to come and live with me as paying guests. This was a great relief to my struggling finances. I had also a lady boarder with us at this time. She was a young Brahmin widow, who had been placed in the Brahmo Samaj by her brother-in-law with a view to give her some useful education and let her have a chance of getting herself remarried. She was brought to the Brahmo Samaj through the instrumentality of Babu Nagendra Nath Chatterjee, one of our missionaries, and his wife. Nagendra Babu was at that time resident minister of the Konnagar Brahmo Samaj. This young widow belonged to Konnagar, and her people came into intimate contact with Nagendra Babu and his good wife. When this young widow was brought to the Brahmo Samaj, Babu Durga Mohan Das offered to pay for her board and lodging in some Brahmo family, and Nagendra Babu placed her with my family. She also was a paying guest of mine. I was then living in Ram Krishna Das's Lane. It was a fairly big house with an open compound on the south. This house stood next to the garden attached to the house of Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar in Brindaban Mallik's Lane. Babu Chandi Charan Banerjee, the biographer of Vidyasagar, shared this house with me.

In those days the Brahmo Samaj actively threw itself into the cause of social reform and particularly of widow remarriage. Many a young Hindu widow found shelter in Brahmo families from where they subsequently got married. We also sometimes helped young Hindu widows to run away from their home and the protection of their families, and gave them shelter and education and, if possible, opportunities of remarriage in the Brahmo Samaj.

About the middle of 1884 an application for help of this kind was received from a young and highly connected Kayastha widow of Konnagar. It came through the young lady from Konnagar who was at that time one of our boarders. My wife agreed to take her in if she was brought to the Brahmo Samaj. Arrangements were therefore made to help her to run away from her home. Babu Krishna Kumar Mitra and an elderly lady, Mrs. Umesh Chandra Bose, and myself (I forget if there were any others) went one morning by boat to Konnagar. According to previous arrangement this young lady came as usual for her daily Ganges bath to the *ghat* and got into our boat. We crossed the river immediately, and leaving our boat at the *ghat* in Panihati drove with her to our house in Badur Bagan. There was no trouble on the way. Her people did not discover her flight in time to pursue us. Her elder brother came the next day and was directed to my house by Brahmo friends near our Prayer Hall. He saw his sister and pressed her to go back with him, but she refused. Going back disappointed this brother of hers returned after three or four hours with a number of rowdies with a view to intimidate me into refusing her protection in my house. This, of course, I could not do. In the course of a few minutes about a couple of hundred young men gathered in my compound and threatened to forcibly take the girl away from my house. I stood firm. And standing at the door leading to the inner apartments, I told them that if they wanted to take the girl by force, let them clearly understand it that they would have to do so by walking over my dead body, and there were my friends behind me who would not submit to any violence of this kind without breaking heads. They were not prepared for this. Some of them declared that they would beat me with their shoes to submission. I went forward singly and advancing to the very centre of the threatening crowd I took off my own shoes and placed these at the hands of my opponents, saying, "Here are my shoes, if you dare, beat me into submission with these, why should you injure your own shoes for so small a thing." This took them aback. They came down from their threatening attitude and said, "How can we assault a gentleman like you?" I said, "I may or may not be a gentleman, but by your

conduct you have proved that you are not." Then somebody said, "Let us have the girl and we will go away." I replied, "No gentleman can hand over a helpless young woman to men of your character. If she will go with her brother, she is free to do so. But I will not allow her to be forcibly taken away from my home." At this time somebody asked her brother to go and bring her. He went up and came back saying that she refused to come with him. But the crowd urged him to say that we were keeping her by force. If she came down and told them herself that she would not come, they would go away. I refused also this offer, saying that no gentle-woman could come to a company like this, at which somebody suggested: "Let her then come to the window on the first floor, and tell us that she is here of her free will and choice." She did this. But the crowd first asked her brother if she was his sister. When he said, "Yes", they asked him to say "No". But he could not refuse to identify her, and she in a clear and loud voice declared that she would rather die than go back to her brother. This settled the matter. But the crowd still tried to create trouble. In the meantime, however, some one had sent intimation to the police and it was whispered about that the police were coming in full force to disperse this unlawful assembly. At this the crowd melted away. This incident deserves record as one of many that occurred in those early days in connection with the social reform propaganda of the Brahmo Samaj. This young lady was connected with Babu Shib Chandra Dev and she was subsequently married to Babu Sitanath Datta, better known now as Pandit Sitanath Tattvabhusan.

About August 1885 my second daughter, a child of ten months, fell seriously ill. It was a case of suspected tuberculosis of the bowels. The doctors advised a change, but I had not the wherewithal to take her out of Calcutta. Babu Durga Mohan Das coming to know of it asked me to go and stay in his house in Camac Street, which would be something of a change from the crowded locality in Champatala, where I was then living. I gratefully accepted his offer. The change, slight though it was, did the little one great good. It was here in November 1885 that my first boy was born. After the usual period of confinement of my wife I was

preparing to come back to my house in Panchanantala Lane (Bow Bazar). Just at this time my father sent me a verbal message through a young man from our village, then studying in Calcutta. When this young man on his way from home came to salute my father, he asked him, without mentioning my name, "Where is he?" This young man said that I was in Calcutta. "What is he doing for his livelihood?" "Trying to eke out a pittance by contributing to the Press," was his reply. "Oh! Contributing to the Press! How much does he get?" "Not much, just enough to keep body and soul together", was the response. At this my father said to him, "If you see him, tell him that my health is breaking down." This was all the message that he sent. When it reached me, I clearly saw that my father wanted to see me. For eight or nine years he had not sent me a word. Indeed, he had persistently refused even to read my letters. When after all these years he sent me word that he was not well, I saw in it that he was wanting me back. This was also the interpretation which Babu Durga Mohan Das put upon this message, and he insisted upon my immediately going to meet my father. But I had my difficulties. The first was how could I leave my wife just recently confined with her baby. The second was the wherewithal to pay for my passage. Babu Durga Mohan Das summarily rejected these objections, saying, "Your wife and children may very well remain with me, and you cannot refuse to let me advance to you the small sum that may be required to take you home." Thus I went to see my father in November 1885, after nearly nine years.

When I met my father he asked me to bring my family home, saying that his health was waning, and he was not able to look after what little property he had, and if I wanted to get anything out of these after he passed away, I must come home and take charge of these. I replied, I was willing to do so not in the hope of getting anything but only if he thought that it would be some relief to him. At this my father asked me to return immediately to Calcutta and come back home as soon as possible with my wife and children. And he paid for their passage, saying that after I had come home with them he would arrange for the settlement of my affairs in Calcutta. Here again Babu Durga

Mohan Das, who had taken a fatherly interest in me ever since he came to know me, once more came to my help, by undertaking to pay all my debts in Calcutta, pending the redemption of my father's words to meet these himself. So towards Christmas 1885, I left Calcutta for home with my wife, two daughters and a boy, the youngest of our children, whose advent had, perhaps more than any other thing, brought about this reconciliation between father and son.

My wife also had very materially prepared for this reconciliation. She came of a highly respectable Brahmin family. She had by her character and conduct won universal admiration and love before her marriage when she was living with Pandit Shivanath Shastri. She was not educated in the modern sense of the term. Of course, she was literate, but her literary culture was of the most meagre character. She hardly knew English. In fact, neither in her brother's home at Allahabad or elsewhere nor when she was brought to the Brahmo Samaj did she go to any public school. All her education was **only** home education. But she proved in her mind and manners **how** a very high order of mental and moral development is not **only** possible but indeed, quite easy to acquire, through hereditary and domestic and social training even without any literary education. This was really the case with my mother who was not at **all** literate, and her's was not a rare instance in those days. The **same** also was the case with my first wife, Nritya Kali. Her innate goodness and particularly her quiet strength of character, her spirit of service and natural dignity of bearing, compelled respect from all those who came in contact with her. My sister had met her in Calcutta only once and must have communicated to my father her impression of my wife. Other friends and relations had also met her and been profoundly impressed by her personality. All these had created a general predisposition in my father towards my wife. And it was very largely this good repute of my wife which must have slowly and silently worked upon my father to lead him to wish to receive me back and see his daughter-in-law and her family.

Thus it was that at the beginning of 1886, I found myself once more in my old home at Poil, sanctified by so many memories

of my mother and my early life. In asking me to go back to it, my father made almost as large a sacrifice as any man could make under those circumstances. I had deliberately put myself out of caste. To Hindu orthodoxy of those days, I and my family were as much untouchables as Mahomedans. After asking me to come back home with my wife and children my father resolved to build a new home for himself, while the old family dwelling would be left to me and my family. Ours was not a *pucca* structure. Our homestead consisted of a number of bamboo and thatch houses. My father proposed to build a similar home for himself in the neighbourhood. It would not take long to build this home. Already orders had been put out for the necessary bamboos and thatch and other materials for it. But my father was extremely anxious that I should hasten back to him with my wife and children and thus wrote to me repeatedly not to waste any time in taking train for our home to Poil. When, therefore, I arrived, the contemplated home for himself had not even commenced to be built. My friend Dr Sundari Mohan Das was at that time stationed at the headquarters of our sub-division, Habiganj, as the medical officer of the local board. Habiganj is about three miles from our home in Poil. On my way from Calcutta, I first got down at Habiganj, and leaving my family with Dr. Sundari Mohan Das, I arrived home by myself. My idea was to keep them there until the new homestead contemplated by my father was ready and he had removed there. But my father would not hear of it. On the other hand, he was aware of it that there might be social troubles if he lived in the same home with us. So my father temporarily secured part of a neighbour's house, where my stepmother would go every morning with one or two attendants, and cook the usual food for the whole family there; my father and other orthodox members of the family going there for their meals, while our food would be brought from there to the old home. This was certainly a great hardship on my stepmother and considerable inconvenience to others. But my father gladly accepted all this for my sake. A cousin of mine suggested to my father to consult the village elders on the matter and ask them why, in the face of the common practice of having Moslem servants in the house for

agricultural operations, I should not live with him separately in the same homestead. My father replied that all through his long life he had never consulted any one in deciding what was right and proper for him to do, and simply because he was now in a difficulty, he was not prepared to break this life-long rule of his. He would rather suffer whatever inconvenience might be involved in the arrangements he had made regarding his meals pending the building of the new home. My cousin replied: "Why not build a home for Bipin, and in the meantime let him stay at Habiganj with Dr. Das?" My father said: "I asked Bipin to come back to his own home, and not to a new home. I cannot change that now. So I must set up a new home and leave this home to him."

But he had not to do this. The day after my wife arrived at her new home, the home of the father of her own children, she fell ill of cholera, which was already paying its periodic visit to our village. For a full fortnight she lay hovering between life and death. At one time her life was despaired of. She lay in a complete comatose condition. Dr. Sundari Mohan Das was with her. I left him in charge, saying that he must do **duty** for doctor, minister and grave-digger himself. During these **anxious** days, my father's affection for his daughter-in-law seemed to grow almost hourly. This affection conquered the rigid laws of **Hindu** orthodoxy. From early morning, and throughout the whole **day** and night, my father would sit by my wife, and personally nurse her. When the doctor prescribed meat soup, I suggested that pigeon soup might be provided for her. But my father said: "Why pigeon? I understand that doctors prefer chicken soup to pigeon soup for these patients, so give her chicken soup." Saying this he at once sent a Mahomedan peon in his service to fetch it from the dak bungalow at Habiganj; and when it was brought, he personally poured out small doses of it and gave it to his beloved daughter with his own hand. This was not a small thing for an old and orthodox Hindu of Bengal to do! When her life was despaired of my father naturally commenced to think of the end and how her dead body would be cremated. Throughout my wife's illness our house used to be crowded with kindly neighbours, Brahmins and Kayasthas

and others. This morning there was a large company of Brahmins and other higher caste people in my father's *natmandir* (literally dancing hall) which was used during the *pujas* as a dancing hall and at other times as a common reception hall. And my father calling me to him said aloud: "We have to think of the end, also, however painful it may be. Do you think between yourself, Dr. Sundari Mohan and his bearer, you will be able to perform the final rites?" But without waiting for my reply, he said: "Not that it at all matters. We too may help you in this and then perform a little expiatory rite." And saying this, he asked the assembled Brahmins, "What do you, gentlemen, say? I see there can be no objection to it." At this the Brahmins, as a matter of course, said ditto to him. By the grace of the Lord that crisis was over in the course of the next twelve hours. And my wife gradually advanced towards convalescence.

Before, however, she was completely restored to health, my father caught the infection. Outwardly it was not at all a serious case. But he seemed to have somehow known that his end was near. Six months before, during the Durga Puja when the family astrologer was making the images, my father one day incidentally told him that this was the last image which he would have to make for his house. A few days, about a fortnight, before we arrived home, he had invited our family priest to dinner and when he sat down to his meals my father remarked that this was the last meal that he would take in his house. The extreme impatience of my father to have me back with him also seemed to indicate that he had some kind of a premonition regarding his approaching end. Not that he was at all weak or ill. Though passed the psalmist's span of life, being seventy-three at this time, my father did not look his age and was as active as he had been at sixty. But when he had this somewhat mild attack of cholera he saw that this was his end. At dawn he had a first motion. A little later a Brahmin youngman was sent for. He was something of a singer. He was asked to sing the songs of Fakirchand, which had circulated far and wide all over Bengal in those days. Fakirchand's real name was Harinath Majumdar. Towards the close of his life he came to be known as Kangal

Harinath. Most of these songs described the vanities of life, and called the mind to the hereafter. My step-mother came and told my wife of my father's illness. I at once went to see him, and found him sitting on his bed and listening to these songs. About an hour later I was called to him. He asked me to sit near him on his bed, and then commenced to ease his mind of the prolonged agonies through which he had passed during my absence from home. Owing to his marriage even my sister persecuted him. All these he suffered in silence, but today his heart burst out as if of all bounds, and communicated to me the great tragedy of his father-love. After this he gave me charge of his temporal affairs. Some people had placed their little savings with him and he named them one by one with the amount deposited with him by them, and asked me to see to it that they had every penny of this trust money returned to them after he had passed away. Having thus made over his charge he asked me to fetch his despatch box saying that in that box there was a will and he wanted me to tear it to pieces before his eyes. This was the will which he had made some years back in Sylhet disinheriting me. I brought the box, opened it with the key which my father placed in my hands; but somehow or other I could not find the will. He then asked me to send for the elders of the village, and asked the clerk who was working in his office keeping accounts of his affairs, to bring a sheet of catridge paper and writing materials. When the village elders arrived, my father dictated a new will in their presence. By this will he left certain properties to my stepmother and sister, and I was mentioned as the executor of the will. At this some of the elders present asked, "What about Bipin?" My father replied, "All the residuary property naturally goes to him; as he is the legal heir there is no need to mention him in the will. According to the Hindu law Bipin having disqualified himself from performing my *sradh* would not be entitled to his inheritance from me. But all that was changed by the decision of the Privy Council in the case of the will of Prasanna Kumar Tagore." Saying this he signed the will and invited the elders present to put their signatures as witnesses. When this was finished, my father gave an explanation to the elders of the community regarding his last

decision concerning me. He said: "For ten years I did not see Bipin's face. By a previous will I disinherited him absolutely. All these years I would not allow him to come near me. But I am convinced that while he went his own way out of regard for what he believed to be his *dharmā* he did not by practising one thing and professing another destroy my *dharmā*. He is not a *haramzada*. All through my life I never drank a drop of water during the *ekadasee* fast by diving underneath the waves; he also did not do it. He is not a *haramzada*. Besides I thought this also, that though there are people who would like to have whatever little property I may leave behind me, there is no one except Bipin, whatever may be his religious principles, who would after my death protect with all his life the honour of my wife and my daughter. This is why I have called him back. These were practically his last words. After this he closed his eyes, and did not open them again during the next twenty-four hours. There was no sign of collapse common to cholera cases." There was no sign of coma either. Evidently having finished and closed finally his account on this side and having done with the vanities of life, it seemed my father entered into communion with his God. Next day at about noon he once opened his eyes and seeing both my stepmother and sister sitting by him he asked, "You are both here, who is looking after the diet of *Bauma*?" This was his last look upon the world, these the last words which his lips uttered concerning the affairs on this side of the grave. Twelve hours later on the break of day on the 12th of Magh, corresponding to the 23rd or 24th of January, 1886 my father's spirit flew out of its mortal abode, finding shelter, I doubt not, in the lap of his God.

With my father's death practically closed the days of my youth. As long as he was alive, near or far, rebel or reconciled, I was under his protection. With his death the burden of the world fell on my weak shoulders.

Book II

**Memories of My Life and Times
(1886-1900)**

Chapter I

GENERAL SURVEY



The first volume of the memories (1857 to 1886) covers a very important period in the history of modern Bengal, and generally of modern India. I was born during the great Sepoy Mutiny. The end of that rebellion closed the administration of the East India Company. Just a year after of my birth, the administration of this great Dependency was taken over by the Crown, abolishing the dual control over it that had prevailed during the previous period. The Government of India henceforth came to be vested solely in the Crown and Parliament of Great Britain.

With all its faults and failures, the administration of India by the East India Company had initiated a line of progress which helped to replace the personal rule, whether of Hindu or Moslem princes and chiefs, by a new reign of law. The anarchy and disorder that had followed the decline and disruption of the Mughal power, was gradually replaced by a more or less centralised settled government. The East India Company, whatever its failings in other directions, helped very materially to give the country peace and protection not only against outside invasion but, what was far more important, to a very large extent equally against internal disorder and the tyranny of the strong over the weak. The memories of this transformation were still green in the minds of the masses in my boyhood, and even naked village urchins when attacked by their fellows used to cry out "*Dohai Company Bahadur*" for protection against their stronger playmates. This was a very significant testimony to the useful work which the East India Company had done in securing peace and order in a land that had been distracted by almost universal anarchy and disorder. It was under the administration of the East India Company that almost all the progressive movements of modern India were

initiated. It was the Government of the East India Company which introduced English education amongst us, and thus opened a new and powerful contact between mediaeval India and the modern world; the institution of the three universities of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay, which though formally opened in 1858, after the transfer of the Government of India to the Crown, had been really planned before this transfer. And it is very significant that the Sepoy Mutiny did not alter that old policy. On the contrary, the experiences of that nervous period in the history of British India strengthened that liberal policy as the only reasonable guarantee against catastrophies of a similar kind.

The Sepoy Mutiny, particularly in Bengal, left the general population of the country absolutely cold. They belonged to a generation that had seen and suffered from the anarchy and disorder of immediate pre-British rule. During the quarter of a century that preceded the outbreak of the Mutiny, the life and property of the people were being increasingly secured against the oppressions of their stronger neighbours. Law courts were established in increasing numbers for the peaceful settlement of neighbourly disputes. Dacoity was practically suppressed. People, therefore, could travel from one part of the country to another with a greater assurance of safety than before. Along with these material advantages secured to them by the administration of the East India Company, new intellectual and moral forces came into operation through the introduction of English education, to create fresh spiritual bonds between the new generation of English-educated Bengalees and their foreign political masters. With the transfer of the government from the East India Company to the Crown and Parliament of Great Britain these forces were strengthened and increasingly organised, giving birth to a new sense of loyalty to the British in both the classes and the masses alike. This is the real reason why not only the Mutiny did not touch our people at all in Bengal, but the suppression of it and the returning prospect of settled government was hailed with universal delight by them.

Bengal was moved far more powerfully than the other Indian provinces by the new ideals of freedom and equality of 18th

century European Illumination, which the British brought with them, because of the original genius and age-long individuality of the Bengalee people. Bengal had been a stronghold of Buddhism, almost from the very birth of that great movement of social democracy and rationalism. In fact, it is believed that the Moslem occupation of Bengal was not as strenuously opposed by the Bengalee people as it was by the Hindu populations of the other Indian provinces because the great bulk of the Buddhists of Bengal, subjected to the social tyranny of revived Brahminism, practically welcomed the alien invaders of their country as saviours. Dr. Dinesh Chandra Sen commenting on a remarkable passage in an ancient Bengali poem, which described a fight between the Moslems and the Brahminical Hindus in the neighbourhood of Maldah or Gour, says:

What historical incident is referred to in the description given in this poem is not clearly known. But it unmistakably points to a general feeling of gratification with which the Buddhists watched the oppression of the Brahmins by the Mahomedans which they attributed to divine wrath for atrocities committed upon themselves.

This seems to throw considerable light upon the psychological interpretation of the conquest of Gour by the Moslems. It seems to have been very much like the conquest of Bengal, within the memory of history, by Clive. And all these bear testimony to the individuality of Bengal by which it has stood differentiated from the other Indian provinces or peoples. The sense of the Unseen, the Spiritual and the Universal in religion, and the instinct of personal freedom and social equality have been an original sense and instinct in the Bengalee people. This is how the Hindu law of Bengal has been different from the Hindu law of the other Indian provinces. The keynote of the Bengal school of Hindu law, the Dayabhaga, is individualism, while the keynote of the Mitakshara school, which governs the rest of India, has been what may be called *collectivism*. In the former the owner of property is, in his individual capacity, its sole master; in the latter property belongs

not to any individual member of the family but to the family as a whole. Sir Henry Sumner Maine surmises that the Bengalee people, having been from very ancient times a mercantile community, gave birth to the special Hindu law of Bengal. In Bengal, we never had a theocratic head of society like the Sankaracharyas in Madras and Maharashtra. Islamic culture worked upon this original instinct or inheritance of freedom and democracy of the Bengalee people and contributed to the evolution of a new and composite culture in this province. While in the provinces of Agra and Oudh, the Hindus coming into closer contact with the externals of Moslem civilisation adopted almost universally the Moslem dress and the etiquettes of the Pathan and Moghul courts and even the camp language of their Moslem political masters, this did not happen to the same extent in Bengal. On the other hand, Bengal was influenced more powerfully than the other Indian provinces, with the exception possibly of the Punjab, by the spiritual and social message of Islam. It is now frankly admitted by such acknowledged authorities on the history of Buddhism in Bengal as the late Mahamahopadhyaya Pandit Haraprasad Shastri that the great bulk of the Moslems of Bengal were converts not from Hinduism but from Buddhism, and there are large sections among the Moslem population in East and North Bengal who do not observe, unlike the Moslems of the rest of India, the Semitic tribal custom of circumcision. It is also significant that Bengal has enshrined in her religious and spiritual life the memories and relics of more *pirs* or saints who are worshipped both by Hindus and Moslems in our rural areas than any other Indian province. All these are clear evidences of the sociological and spiritual affinities between the deeper currents and the higher reaches of Islam and Bengal Hinduism. While Upper India more extensively adapted itself to the outer trappings of Islamic civilisation and culture, Bengal, it seems, assimilated more intensively its inner spirit.

The same thing happened also in regard to the new culture and civilisation which our British masters brought with them to us. The British rulers up to the time of the Mutiny were, many of them, steeped in the idealism of the French illumination. And

Bengal, owing to her original spirit of personal liberty and social freedom, more readily accepted the new gospel of equality, fraternity and liberty of modern European culture. This is the real explanation of the fact that while English education was almost simultaneously introduced in the three presidencies of Bombay, Madras and Bengal by the incorporation of the three older universities, Bengal was far more profoundly affected by the spirit of rationalism and individualism of 19th century European culture. This was why Bengal practically led the great Freedom Movement in modern India.

The first organised movement of individual and social democracy in Bengal was that of the Brahmo Samaj. The Brahmo Samaj under Debendra Nath Tagore initiated this movement of spiritual and social freedom. It, however, reached almost its zenith under Keshub Chunder Sen. This movement of religious and social revolt inevitably reacted upon the political consciousness of the educated Bengalees, and thus was inaugurated for the first time in Bengal an organised campaign of political emancipation and progress. The trumpeter of this campaign was Surendra Nath, while the Indian Association, started in 1876, was its first organised vehicle and instrument. There were political associations in Bengal as well as in the other presidencies before the birth of the Indian Association. The Bombay Presidency Association and the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, the Madras Mahajana Sabha and our own British Indian Association, had been in existence at the time of the birth of the Indian Association. But these were local bodies, representing more or less limited provincial or class interests. The growing educated middle class in the country, as much in Bengal as in the other provinces, who represented in a special sense and to a specially large degree the spirit of freedom and democracy inspired by the new education imparted through the universities, were really without any organisation of their own before 1876. The Indian Association was the first to organise the political thoughts and sentiments of this growing educated middle-class directly in Bengal and indirectly outside this province also. The Indian Association was inspired from its birth by the ideal of Indian unity, and at once set to work

to bring the educated intelligentsia of the different Indian provinces upon one broad political platform.

The Indian Association (as Surendra Nath says in his *A Nation in Making*) supplied a real need. It soon focussed the public spirit of the middle class and became the centre of the leading representatives of the educated community of Bengal.

Two of its main objects were (1) the creation of a strong body of public opinion in the country and (2) the unification of the Indian races and peoples upon the basis of common political interests and aspirations. In this, as well in its ideals of personal liberty and political emancipation, the political movement initiated by the Indian Association really followed in the wake of the socio-religious movement of the Brahmo Samaj. The Brahmo Samaj, specially under the leadership of Keshub Chunder Sen, was the first to inaugurate an all-India movement of religious and social reforms. Missionaries of the Brahmo Samaj carried the message of a new religious and social freedom far and wide all over the Indian continent. As early as 1864 Keshub went out on a missionary tour to Bombay where his visit resulted in awakening the religious enthusiasm of the educated community. Four years later, in 1868, he made an extensive missionary tour of the North Western Provinces (at present called the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh) and Bombay, delivering soul-stirring addresses on social and religious reform. He had also been to Madras. And as a result of these missionary activities Brahmo congregations had sprung up in many of the intellectual centres of modern India. These Brahmo Samajas were linked up with the central organisation, the Brahmo Samaj of India, which had its headquarters in Calcutta.

The message of the Brahmo Samaj was essentially a message of personal liberty and social equality and emancipation. So far there was no political freedom movement in the country for the simple reason that the conflict between the subject populations of India and the suzerain political power had not as yet sufficiently developed to call into being a political movement. The desire for

freedom is universally quickened by the pain of restraint and subjection. English education and British administration with their message of rationalism and individualism first created a keen and bitter conflict in our religious and social life, dominated as these were by priestly authority and caste exclusiveness and inequalities. The educated intelligentsia refused to accept their faith without question or criticism from the scriptures and traditions of their people. On the face of it, popular Hinduism sanctioned the worship of many gods and goddesses and was, therefore, believed to be openly polytheistic, which was in direct conflict with the fundamental teachings of monotheism, supported as these were by the philosophical and theological studies of our English educated classes. They could not honestly render allegiance to this popular faith which was regarded by them as false. Refusal to worship popular gods and goddesses led to social ostracism. Neither could the new educated intelligentsia in the country be loyal to the institution of caste or accept the restrictions imposed upon their freedom in the matter of food and drink. Those who were loyal to their own convictions had to suffer separation from home and family, while others who could not brave these social persecutions equally suffered mental agony and the condemnation of their own conscience for conceding to the dictates of irrational and immoral social distinctions from fear of social ostracism. The natural result of it was the initiation of our first freedom movement in the sphere of our religious and social life. British authority in the country, on the contrary, supported sometimes openly and sympathised universally with the new propaganda of religious and social freedom. When Keshub Chunder Sen first publicly entered his protest against the unreason of popular Hinduism and the iniquities of current social laws and customs of the Hindus, he was openly hailed as a deliverer of his people by Lord Lawrence, the then Viceroy and Governor-General of India. Keshub Chunder's annual addresses in the Town Hall of Calcutta used to be almost state functions attended by the highest officials in the metropolis. The Government of India lent its support to the reform propaganda of the Brahmo Samaj by undertaking, at the instance of Keshub, to pass a special

legislation for legalising non-idolatrous and inter-caste marriages by the members of the Samaj. In these and other ways the government expressed its practical sympathy with the movement of religious and social freedom inaugurated by the Brahmo Samaj.

This had its indirect effect upon our new political consciousness as well. We saw that in our onward march to intellectual and social emancipation the new political authority in the country would be with us and not against us. Indeed, the new advocates of religious and social reform frankly recognised the protection which they had from British political authority in the country to their personal rights and liberties from attacks by their orthodox fellow countrymen. Under the old Hindu law no non-Brahmin could utter the sacred texts of the Vedas, much less study and interpret them to the people with impunity. Those who were condemned to excommunication by the old and orthodox society could not perform the after-death ritual for their parents and, therefore, could not claim their inheritance because the right of inheritance, according to the Hindu law, went with the duty of duly performing the after-death ceremony of the dead owner of the property. The new government removed this ancient disability by the ruling of the Privy Council that no subject of the Britannic Majesty in India should be deprived of his rightful inheritance on account of his change of religion. These liberal measures of the British Government in India naturally created the impression in the minds of the generation of our educated intelligentsia that but for the presence of this suzerain political authority in the country, they could never have enjoyed that personal liberty and social freedom which they valued so dearly. All these things practically prevented the growth of any militant political freedom-movement along with the social and religious freedom movement inaugurated by the Brahmo Samaj. In fact, the conflict between the Brahmo Samaj and the old Hindu orthodoxy was at one time so keen and bitter, and the protection which the new community of social and religious reformers had from British law and authority in the country was so vital to their very existence as an advanced church or community, that Kesbub Chunder Sen openly

proclaimed 'loyalty to the British Government' as an article of the creed of his church.

All this, however, commenced to rapidly change as English education spread, quickening a new self-consciousness and creating a new conceit of freedom and self-respect in the rising generation of our English-educated middle class, which soon brought them into more or less open conflict with their foreign political masters. As long as the new gospel of personal liberty and social freedom rebelled against the religious and social authority to which people had been subjected from time immemorial, the new political masters of the country not only tolerated but directly or indirectly encouraged this revolt. When the non-Brahmin claimed social equality with the Brahmin, his courage was openly commended by the British officials in his neighbourhood. It was applauded as an example of moral heroism, because here the non-Brahmin braved social persecution involving serious personal inconveniences and even privations. Our British masters looked upon this social revolt practically as a homage paid to their own civilisation and culture by their Indian subjects. This social and religious revolt helped very materially to remove the great and politically dangerous chasm that divided them from their Indian subjects. In the early days of British rule in Bengal, the new political masters of the country were looked down upon by the people as *Mlechhas*, physically and morally unclean persons. Both their Hindu and Moslem subjects were then controlled by their respective religious and sacerdotal codes which condemned all people who did not observe their special laws of life to heresy here and hell hereafter. The British had not as yet secured any moral hold upon their new subjects. The latter accepted their political domination out of fear for the physical consequences of revolt against their authority. The inevitable result of it was a sullen and secret moral revolt against the culture and civilisation which the British had brought with them to this country. This state of things could not continue for long. Either the moral gulf between the ruler and the ruled must be bridged or the new British dominion in India would be shattered hopelessly through a great and volcanic upheaval among the people against

the new political authority. This danger had been recognised by British statesmanship in India. The initiation of the new educational policy sponsored by Lord Macaulay and the Anglicists who advocated the introduction of modern European education imparted through the medium of the English language to the rising generation of the intellectual classes of their subjects was inspired by this far-seeing policy. The objective of this policy was to raise a moral and spiritual bulwark against the new alien political authority in the country by means of a body of English-educated leaders of the people who would frankly recognise an absolute assurance of the unhampered advance of their new ideas of personal liberty and social freedom in the maintenance of British authority in the government and administration of the country. This hope was certainly justified by actual results in the earlier stages of our socio-political evolution under the British rule. But gradually a new conflict arose between the English-educated middle class and the alien political authority in the country, first, through competition between our English-educated youngmen looking for employment in the higher services and British youths who were being imported to run the administration of India.

This conflict between the rights and aspirations of the educated Indians and the privileges of the alien ruling class in the country came out into the open when three Bengalee youngmen, Behari Lal Gupta, Romesh Chunder Dutt and Surendra Nath Banerjee, entered the Indian Civil Service in the same year through the door of open competitive examination. These examinations were held in London. The syllabus was framed specially to suit British youths trained in English public schools and universities. The government, here in India and in England, did not foresee the contingency that Indian youngmen would brave the risks and difficulties of a sojourn in England at a tender age and cut themselves off from their society and religious communion on the off-chance of entering the higher branches of the public service in their own country. The simultaneous admission of three Bengalee youngmen into the Indian Civil Service was, therefore, something of a rude awakening to many members of this service. It was really the inauguration of a new movement among us to

enter the Civil Service in increasing numbers and thereby gradually take charge of the administration of our country into our own hands. This was naturally viewed as an attack on British authority and prestige by many members of the Civil Service. This created, therefore, a new conflict between the government and our educated middle class.

This conflict came out glaringly to public view in the trial and dismissal of Surendra Nath. Surendra Nath's first appointment, which also became his last, was in Sylhet. British officials in Sylhet at first treated Surendra Nath with kindness and offered to patronise him. Surendra Nath, however, inwardly resented this patronising spirit of his brother civilians particularly of the district magistrate, who had taken him under his special protection. Surendra Nath and his wife claimed social equality with the higher officials in the district as a matter of right, won through Surendra Nath's high English education and sojourn in England. This was the real origin of the quarrel between Surendra Nath and the district magistrate. This quarrel was the real cause of his trial by a commission of British officials on a trumpery charge, and his subsequent removal from the Civil Service by the Government of India under orders from the Secretary of State. Surendra Nath went to England in the hope of receiving from the British Parliament that justice which had been denied him by the Government in India. But he failed in this attempt. He next had himself entered in one of the Inns of Court with a view to qualify for the Bar. But here again the benchers of his Inn refused to call him to the Bar on the plea of the moral stigma with which he had been marked by the government in his dismissal from the Civil Service. His educated countrymen looked upon Surendra Nath's trial and dismissal as an open attack by the British officials in India upon their rights as equal subjects of the Britannic Majesty. This feeling found additional support from a very different treatment that was meted out to a British member of the Indian Civil Service who had been a district and sessions judge in Bengal. The charge against this British judge was that he had his judgements almost systematically written for him by his Indian bench-clerk. Surendra Nath had been guilty of "gross care-

lessness", as the district judge of Sylhet wrote in his report to the High Court on the complaint brought against him by the district magistrate. The Judge even went further, and sought to more or less extenuate this carelessness on the part of Surendra Nath by saying that at the time when Surendra Nath committed this act of "gross carelessness" he was very much overworked. But in the case of this district judge it was not an act of carelessness, but deliberate and systematic neglect of sacred duties, and the consequent liability of the prostitution of British justice of which he was guilty. Yet while Surendra Nath was expelled from the service with a stigma upon his character, this judge was allowed to retire from it on a pension. These two cases happening in almost quick succession, one after the other, brought out the inner spirit of the British bureaucracy in India and caused universal irritation and indeed profound indignation in the educated classes all over the continent. It was interpreted by them as an almost open repudiation of the solemn pledge given to the people of India by the British Sovereign and British Parliament in the Royal Proclamation issued at the close of the Sepoy Mutiny in 1858. This was really the beginning of our political conflict under British rule, which was the parent of our new political freedom movement.

Surendra Nath was expelled from the Indian Civil Service in 1874. Within less than three years the Marquis of Salisbury issued an order reducing the maximum limit of age for the open competitive examination for the Indian Civil Service from 21 to 19 years. It was regarded by the educated classes in India as a deliberate attempt to prevent Indian students from competing for admission into the Indian Civil Service in any appreciable number. This lent practical support to the suspicions created in the public mind in India by Surendra Nath's trial and dismissal that the British authorities in India no less than the British Cabinet and Parliament looked with strong disfavour on the admission of Indians into the Indian Civil Service in increasing numbers. The Indian Association, which had been started in 1876, took up this challenge in right earnest and organised a public demonstration in Calcutta, on March 24, 1877, to enter an emphatic protest

against this reactionary step. It was the first all-Bengal political demonstration. It was presided over by Maharaja Sir Narendra Krishna Bahadur, one of the leaders of the British Indian Association. Not only the leading men of Calcutta, but even delegates from the interior of the province attended this demonstration. "Keshub Chunder Sen, who had never in his life taken part in any political meeting, was persuaded to move the election of the President." Says Surendra Nath in his autobiography:

This meeting was one of the biggest public demonstrations held in Calcutta; it was destined to be the forerunner of similar and even more crowded meetings all over India. The agitation was the means, the raising of the maximum limit of age for the open competitive examination and the holding of simultaneous examinations were among the ends, but the underlying conception, and the true aim and purpose of Civil Service agitation was the awakening of a spirit of unity and solidarity among the people of India. It was accordingly resolved to appeal to the whole of India and bring the various Indian provinces upon the same common platform (a thing that had never been attempted before), and to unite them through a sense of a common grievance and the inspiration of a common resolve.

This all-Bengal demonstration was followed by an all-India deputation with the declared object of getting up an all-India memorial to Parliament against the new Civil Service Regulation. Surendra Nath was appointed special delegate to visit the different provinces.

Inter-provincial relations or inter-communication between the different provinces of the great Indian continent had never really been unknown even in the far distant past, long before the advent of Moslems who brought the whole of India more or less under one polity, if not exactly under one government or administration. The Indian continent had been studded with numerous holy places to which the pious from every province made frequent pilgrimages.

The location of these holy places is a significant testimony to the ancient sense of Indian unity. From Rameswaram in the south and Dwaraka in the west, to Hardwar on the north, and Kamakshya on the east, we had many places of pilgrimage regarded as sacred by every Hindu sect and denomination; and all these offered great openings from olden times to inter-provincial travels and communication to our people.

In modern British India, as already noted, the Brahmo Samaj under Keshub Chunder Sen was the first all-India organisation. The Indian Association followed practically in the wake of the mission work of the Brahmo Samaj, and tried to carry the message of new political freedom all over India. In Upper India branch Indian Associations were started following upon Surendra Nath's tour in the summer of 1877. It may also be noted that Surendra Nath in this his first political missionary tour of Upper India was accompanied by Babu Nagendra Nath Chatterjee, who had already consecrated his life to the mission work of the Brahmo Samaj, and who was consequently well-known to the different Brahmo congregations as a powerful and fascinating Bengalee orator. In fact, during the early years of its life, the Indian Association received material assistance from the leaders of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, almost all of whom were members of the Executive Committee of the Indian Association.

There had been practically little or no political activity in those days in the United Provinces or the Punjab. Surendra Nath's delegation to northern India brought into being a new political consciousness; and political organisations were started to give expression to this new political ideal and aspiration. At Lahore, writes Surendra Nath in his autobiography, he was received with the utmost kindness by people of all denominations, Hindus, Moslems and Sikhs. "It showed (he adds) that a common system of administration and education had prepared the ground for the realisation of one of our most cherished ideals, namely, united action by the different Indian provinces for the fulfilment of our common national aims and aspirations". As a result of Surendra Nath's propaganda, a political association under the name of the Lahore Indian Association was formed. Its constitution was

modelled on that of the Indian Association of Calcutta. It was affiliated to that body. It was the first political organisation in the Punjab that provided a common platform for all sections of the Indian community. Similar associations were also formed, in course of this political itinerary of Surendra Nath, at Meerut, Allahabad, Cawnpore and Lucknow.

Next year, in the winter of 1878, Surendra Nath was deputed by the Indian Association on the same mission in western and southern India. A public meeting was held in Bombay, and the resolutions and memorials of the Calcutta public meeting on the new Civil Service Regulation were in substance adopted. From Bombay Surendra Nath went to Surat and Ahmedabad, and returning to Bombay he went to Poona. In all these places public meetings were held and the Calcutta resolutions were adopted. From Poona he went to Madras, where for some reason or other a meeting could not be held, but there was a conference of leading men at Pacheappay's Hall at which the Calcutta memorials and resolutions were adopted. This tour of Surendra Nath brought, as he observes, for the first time under British rule, all India with its varied races and religions, upon the same platform in a common and united effort. "Thus was it demonstrated," Surendra Nath adds, "by an object-lesson of impressive significance, that whatever might be our differences in respect of race and language or social and religious institutions, the people of India could combine and unite for the attainment of their common political ends... . The public men of the time were not forgetful of the lesson thus taught; and a deputation of the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, which visited Calcutta in 1878, pointedly referred to it at a conference held in the rooms of the British Indian Association as opening the way for the united political efforts of an awakened India."

This all-India Civil Service agitation and the adoption of a common memorial to the House of Commons, praying for the rescinding of the orders of the Secretary of State for India by raising the limit of age for the open competitive examination to 22 years, by the different presidency towns and other centres of provincial administration and intellectual and political life, was

followed by the deputation of Mr. Lal Mohan Ghose to England to carry on the agitation there. Raja Ram Mohun Roy had been the first Bengalee who went to England on what might be called public business. The Raja's delegation, however, was not on behalf of the people of India, but on behalf of the Moghul Emperor, who still held some vestiges, however nominal, of the old imperial authority, and who charged Raja Ram Mohun to plead with the British king and cabinet for the redress of some of his grievances. The Raja did not confine his activities in England to this work only. His presence and the acquaintances which he made with the leaders of British thought of those days, no doubt, helped materially to raise Indian culture and civilisation in the estimation of many an eminent Englishman. His appearance before the Select Committee of the House of Commons on India and the evidence which he gave before it indicated or, more correctly anticipated the broad lines of political advance and administrative reform in British India. Beyond this the Raja's English visit had little or no influence upon the course of public policy in England with regard to India or upon the consciousness of the Indian people themselves. The first professedly Indian mission to England was that of Keshub Chunder Sen in 1871. Keshub's was, however, not a political but a specific religious mission. His religious lectures in India, particularly his remarkable address on 'Jesus Christ: Europe and Asia', had already attracted the notice of the highest government officials in this country as well as the representatives of the Christian churches both in India and in England. At one time, immediately after the publication of his lecture on Jesus Christ, Keshub had roused very large expectations in the minds of his Christian admirers, both in India and abroad, that he would gradually find the salvation, which he was so eagerly seeking, in Christ and the Christian Church. Though Keshub's next public lecture on 'Great Men' helped to dissipate to a very large extent these fond expectations regarding his religious future, his soul-stirring eloquence and fervent piety were still universally recognised. Keshub went to England, where his reputation as the most powerful leader of young India had already preceded him, and was literally lionised by every section of the British people,

from the highest aristocracy to the humbler members of the different non-conformist congregations of the United Kingdom. Keshub's mission to England, though it was not distinctly political, reacted very powerfully upon the awakening of political consciousness of the Indian people. His success in England raised the entire educated community in India in their own estimation and very considerably strengthened the new sense of conceit of their intellectual and moral equality with the members of the alien ruling race in their country. The political freedom movement inaugurated by Ananda Mohan Bose and Surendra Nath Banerjee through the Indian Association owed its psychological origin to the ideal of freedom organised in the Brahmo Samaj and the new national self-confidence and self-consciousness quickened by the English visit of the Brahmo minister.

Mr. Lal Mohan Ghosh's, who was charged with the delegation of the Indian Association to represent the grievances of India in the matter of the new Civil Service Regulations, was the second Indian deputation to England, as it was our first political deputation. Lal Mohan Ghosh met with phenomenal success. He addressed an influential gathering of the members of Parliament and others in Willis' Rooms, and he at once established his claim to be classed with the greatest English orators of the time. The meeting was presided over by John Bright, himself the greatest of English orators of his day, and Lal Mohan spoke with a power and eloquence that excited the admiration of all and evoked the warmest tribute from the president.

The effect of that meeting was instantaneous. Within twenty-four hours of it (writes Surendra Nath), there were laid on the table of the House of Commons, the Rules creating what was subsequently known as the Statutory Civil Service. Under the Parliamentary Statute of 1870, the Government of India were empowered, subject to Rules that were to be framed to make direct appointments of natives of India of proved merit and ability to the Covenanted Civil Service. For over seven years the Government of India had slept over the matter. But so great was the impression created by the

demonstration at Willis' Rooms, having behind it the sentiment of united India, that the Rules, which were only four in number and had been delayed for seven years, were published within twenty-four hours of that meeting.

This Statutory Civil Service did not touch the great moral issue involved in our complaint against the regulations governing the Civil Service examinations in England. That issue could only be settled by first raising the minimum age of the open competitive examination in England and otherwise equalising the chances of Indian and British candidates for this examination. Secondly, it could be settled only by the institution of simultaneous examinations in England and India. These were our demands. We asked for no favour. We prayed for no concessions. We were confident that, given equal opportunities, Indian young men would be able to hold their own against their English rivals in this examination. The Statutory Civil Service was to be recruited not by open competitive examination in India but by nominations made by the government of India. This right of nomination placed large powers in the hands of the Indian Government and thereby added a new instrument to their armoury for keeping their hold on the people, if not indeed, demoralising them. These theoretic objections notwithstanding, it was a considerable advance upon the previous order of things. Before the institution of this Statutory Civil Service no Indian who had not passed the Covenanted Civil Service examination in England could be a district magistrate or district and sessions judge. By the institution of the Statutory Civil Service these responsible posts were thrown open to "natives of India of proved merit and ability", the judge of their merit and ability being however the British executive in India. This was certainly demoralising. But the general effect of the success of Mr. Lal Mohan Ghosh's deputation to England was far greater than what was indicated by the action of the Secretary of State for India, who tried to meet the Indian demand half-way by the institution of the Statutory Civil Service. It was far more moral than political. It added considerably to our pride and strengthened our conceit of intellectual equality with our foreign masters. It

also revealed the possibilities of organised political agitation in India with a view to bring educated Indian opinion to bear irresistibly upon the policy and action of the British Government in the country. Lal Mohan Ghosh was deputed to England once again by the Indian Association. It was during this visit that Lal Mohan Ghosh was invited to contest a parliamentary election in the Liberal interest in Deptford. And but for the Irish vote that went against him at the last moment, Lal Mohan would have been the first Indian member of the British House of Commons. Lal Mohan's parliamentary candidature also reacted powerfully upon our infant nationalist politics. Its effect was most pronounced in Bengal, where a new political force was fast gathering strength in our educated middle class, who were advancing rapidly into considerable power and influence over their fellow countrymen in every district through their position at the Bar. This was the beginning of what came to be subsequently characterised as 'Vakil Raj'.

The Brahmo Samaj, as already noted, had contributed very materially to the development of our new national consciousness, and in the initiation of the first freedom movement in modern India. Two other movements soon came into existence, which without exactly following the line of the Brahmo Samaj made, however, from some points of view perhaps, even greater contributions to this Freedom Movement. One was the Arya Samaj, and the other the Theosophical Society.

Dayananda Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj, started his mission early in the seventies of the last century. He visited important centres, particularly of Sanskrit culture, holding disputations with learned Pandits on ancient Vedic religion. His contention was that current Hindu ceremonialism or the worship of many gods and goddesses of popular Hindu pantheon had no sanction in the Vedas. Vedic Hinduism, he claimed, was purely monotheistic, the Vedas being the universally accepted scriptural authority of Hinduism, sanctioning the worship of the One Supreme Being, the True, the Self-Conscious and the Infinite, only. The reform of Hindu religion and society which had fallen into decay through the neglect of the old Vedic culture could only

be affected by going back to the Vedas and reviving Vedic worship and rituals or *jajnas*, said Dayananda. Along with this the Hindus must also resume the old Vedic domestic sacraments, and revive the Vedic institutions of the four *ashramas* which had degenerated through being mixed up with the mediaeval system of caste. Originally, there were no hereditary castes among the Vedic Aryans. Caste was not hereditary, but represented only the different social orders, organised on the basis of various social functions and duties. No one was born a Brahmin nor did any one become a Kshatriya or a Vaisya or a Sudra by birth, but only by the particular profession or calling which he adopted and for which he was qualified by nature and training. This briefly was the sum and substance of the propaganda of Dayananda Saraswati.

In this he was practically on a line with Raja Ram Mohun Roy. Where he differed from the Brahmo Samaj, and indeed, even from Raja Ram Mohun Roy, was in his theory of Vedic infallibility. Raja Ram Mohun accepted the authority of the Vedas as interpreted by the exegetics and apologetics of ancient Hinduism. The nature of scriptural authority in Hindu culture differed from the scriptural authority recognised by the other great world religions in this, namely, that while Christianity or Islam claimed more or less exclusive divine authority for their own books, the Vedas never put up any such claims. Modern Hinduism suffered in some sense from a great disability, as compared to Christianity and Islam, owing to the universal character of their scriptures, particularly of the Vedas. Dayananda Saraswati recognised this disadvantage and was evidently moved by the militant spirit of evangelical Christianity, and Islamic missionary propaganda to create and foster a similar militancy in Hinduism itself. He was therefore moved to advance for the Vedas exactly the same kind of supernatural authority and exclusive revelation which was claimed by the Christians for their Bible, and by the Muslims for their Quoran. In this Dayananda Saraswati practically made a new departure from the line of ancient Hindu Fathers, from Jaimini and Vyasa to Raja Ram Mohun; and at the same time practically denied the very fundamentals of modern

world-thought. But even by thus deviating from the ancient line of Hindu evolution he rendered an immense service to the new nationalist movement in India. He saw that both Christianity and Islam were making fatal inroads upon Hinduism. He realised that unless this process of conversion to Christianity and Islam of increasing numbers of Hindus could be stopped, India would cease in course of time to be the land of the Hindus, the main body of the people being divided into Moslems and Christians, Moslems in Upper India and Christians in the South. Christianity and Islam must therefore be fought with their own weapons, and Hinduism must find this weapon in the Vedas, proclaimed as an exclusive revelation without which there is and can be no salvation for man, whatever may be his country. Christian and Islamic universalism is based upon the universality and infallibility of the Christian and the Islamic scriptures. Whoever accepts the authority of the Bible and the doctrine of salvation through Christ proclaimed by the Bible becomes entitled to enter the Kingdom of Heaven absolutely regardless of his birth or parentage or his native country. It is so with Islam. Whoever accepts the Quoran as the revealed law of God, and Mahomed as the Prophet sent by God to show the way of salvation to man, can be a member of the Islamic fraternity, equally entitled with every other member of it to the inheritances promised by Allah to the faithful. We had nothing like it in ancient or mediaeval Hinduism. Hinduism believes in the universality of man's salvation. It believes in the universality of God's love and grace. If and wherever Hinduism speaks of heaven or hell it is done as a temporary stage in the process of the evolution of a man's soul. It is part of what may be called a scheme of the education of the human race. And as Hinduism never conceived of a heaven to which Hindus alone would be entitled to enter or of a hell to which all non-Hindus would be condemned, it never set up the dogma of infallible scriptural authority familiar to credal systems like Christianity or Islam. Dayananda was, however, profoundly influenced by what might be called the credal universalism of Christianity and Islam to seek for the foundations of it in his own national religion. This was, it seems to me, the real psychology of the doctrine of Vedic

infallibility set up by Dayananda Saraswati, upon which he wanted to build up the Hindu society and the Hindu nation inspired with a great mission among the peoples of the world. The *Satyarth-Prakash*, which contains the teachings of Dayananda, clearly proves this interpretation of the psychology of the Arya Samaj. Whatever may be the philosophical value of these teachings, and however much these may be discordant with some of the bedrock doctrines and ideals of Hindu Universalism, it cannot be denied that the movement of Dayananda Saraswati, as organised in the Arya Samaj, has contributed more than the rational movement of the Raja's Brahmo Samaj to the development of a new national consciousness in the modern Hindu, particularly in the Punjab. It was no small thing for the Hindu suffering for centuries under what the psychologists call now the 'inferiority complex' to be able to challenge aggressive Christianity and Islam by setting up this dogma of Vedic infallibility against their dogma of supernatural revelation; while at the same time he was able to appeal to the social economy of the Vedic Hindu not only to remove the numerous social disabilities under which the present day Hindu laboured, but also to claim a social order based upon the teachings of the Vedas which was from some points of view even superior to the advanced social idealism inspired by the dogma of liberty, equality and fraternity of the French Illumination. India did not stand in need of going to Europe either for a purer religion or for a purer social order; this could be found in the ancient scriptures of the people themselves. This was really the beginning of that religious and social revival among the Hindus of India to which we owe so largely the birth of our present national consciousness.

Dayananda Saraswati appeared early in the seventies of the last Christian era on the arena of our socio-religious thought and life. Before the close of that decade Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott landed at Bombay with a new and strange message, namely, that of what they called Ancient Wisdom. The special significance of Theosophy to us in India lay in the declaration that the ancient sages of India, along with the representatives of ancient Egyptian, Babylonian, Median and Assyrian religions and cultures,

had been the recipients of this Ancient Wisdom; but while in those lands this Wisdom had vanished with the practical disappearance of every vestige of their thought and civilisation, evidence of which are found only in the ruins of their old cities and the records of their history and culture buried in the womb of earth in brick tablets, this Ancient Wisdom still existed as a living current transmitted from master to disciple in India. These Great Masters, unknown to the multitudes, lived in the inaccessible recesses of the Himalayas from where they directed and controlled, by their psychic powers or soul-force, the great movements of history working perpetually for the regeneration of man. In this Ancient Wisdom all the religions of the world were completely reconciled as expressions within the limitations of clime and time of the same Eternal Truth, and as diverse endeavours through various physical, psychophysical, ethical and spiritual exercises and disciplines to reach the highest plane of life. Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott, though they had received their illumination while in Europe and America, and had been charged with the mission of this new cult or culture before landing in India, were directed by the Great Masters to make this continent the headquarters of their movement.

English education and contact with modern European rationalism, resulting from this education, had created a wide and increasing breach between the new thought in India and the traditional life and institutions of the people. This caused a deep and widening intellectual and moral unrest more or less among all sections of the Indian people. The Brahmo Samaj tried to solve it by practically accepting this European rationalism and individualism as the gospel of India's salvation. But few people could have the courage of their convictions to follow the practical social reforms of the Brahmo Samaj. It involved cruel social ostracism. In the earliest stage of the Brahmo Samaj movement those who had joined the Samaj, were not only denied association with their own family and caste but even refused the services of the washerman and the barber, which was the extreme form of social punishment. Their dead would not be touched and carried to the cremation ground by their neighbours. They became literally

like the pariahs in Madras, with this difference that while even the pariahs, whose very shadow or sight was a pollution to the caste-proud Brahmin, had a community of their own, the Brahmos were as yet only isolated individuals or families living scattered all over the country, particularly in Bengal, and suffered consequently the unspeakable horrors of this social ostracism. Few of those who believed in the doctrines and ideals of the Brahma Samaj had therefore the courage to openly join it. The vast majority of the newly-educated classes were condemned to live in an agonising mental and moral conflict. The denial of the truth as they believed it to be had undermined their moral stamina and driven not a few of them to an openly irreligious and immoral life.

Theosophy came to these classes of people as a veritable gospel of peace and salvation. The message of Theosophy offered an open apology in defence of our current faiths and practices, claiming a much higher wisdom than that of modern rationalism, and thus found a much needed reconciliation between their conscience and the customs and traditions of their society to large numbers of our educated classes. The great work of Theosophy was, however, in the moral reclamation of many of these educated Hindus who readily accepted the somewhat rigid disciplines of the new cult that demanded of its votaries complete abstinence from intoxicating drinks and absolute sexual purity for the attainment of that high level of psychic and spiritual powers which it promised. The acceptance of Theosophy, on the other hand, did not call for any repudiation of popular faiths or revolt against current customs. Theosophy, no doubt, proclaimed the universal brotherhood of man, but as this brotherhood could not be attained without the acquisition of high psychic and spiritual powers, there was no wrong or sin in those who had not reached this higher level of spiritual perfection in observing the rules of caste or accepting the sacraments of popular Hinduism. As regards the worship of gods and goddesses, Theosophy openly proclaimed the existence of these gods and goddesses in the great hierarchy of Divine Revelation or Manifestation. And as on the one hand belief in these gods and goddesses did not imply what is called polytheism or meant a denial of the fundamental unity of the

Supreme Being, the Author and Governor of the Universe, and on the other as the worship of these gods and goddesses by means of sacred texts resulted in the development of psychic forces capable of contributing to the well-being of the worshipper, Theosophy found a new exegesis and apology even for the worship of the most recent additions to the Hindu pantheon. By all these means Theosophy helped very materially to remove that 'inferiority complex' from our educated classes from which they had been so seriously suffering almost from the beginning of their initiation into modern European culture through English schools and universities.

The Arya Samaj was, after all, an unmistakable movement of protest. It did not offer any interpretation of or apology for popular Hinduism. It did not tolerate the iniquities of the current laws of caste, it did not support child marriage; though it did not openly advocate, like the Brahmo Samaj, widow marriage, yet by its attempt to revive, though in theory and not exactly in practice, the Vedic custom of *niyoga*, it practically tried to find relief for Hindu widows. The Arya Samaj therefore offered really little help to that very large number of our educated countrymen who lived in the midst of a perpetual moral conflict owing to their failure to intellectually accept popular Hindu faiths and practices on the one hand, and their inability to rebel openly against these on the other. This was done more or less by the Theosophical Society started by Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott. But the greatest contribution of Theosophy to the development of our national consciousness was in its new and strange gospel of Ancient Indian Wisdom and in its announcement of a great world purpose and world mission which India yet had for the races of the modern world.

The Brahmo Samaj had been, from its very birth, practically a Bengal movement. The Bengalees at one time dominated to a very large extent the British administration of the whole of Upper India. The superior clerks almost in every public office, whether government or of the Railways, in the United Provinces and the Punjab, were oftentimes Bengalees, and they did not hesitate,

whenever they could do so with impunity, to lord it over not only the general masses of the people but even the newly educated classes. They tried to fill their office establishment with their own relations and acquaintances to the prejudice of the local claimants. The Bengalees, though generally held in respect, could not however win the heart of the people of these outer provinces. They held, to some extent, the same position in the eyes of the common people as their British masters. With the rapid progress of English education among the inhabitants of these provinces, an inevitable rivalry soon commenced to develop between the Bengalee residents in different districts in Upper India and the new generation of educated middle-class among the indigenous populations. This was very largely responsible for the failure of the Brahmo Samaj movement outside Bengal. As the general body of educated Indians felt a natural antagonism to the Christian missionary propaganda, on account of its association with the political power and the ruling caste in the country, even so the great bulk of the educated community in Upper India and the Punjab felt a secret opposition to the Brahmo Samaj owing to its being essentially a Bengalee movement. The Arya Samaj was not so. Dayananda was himself a Gujarati by birth, but his movement could in no sense be called a Gujarati movement. Those who were associated with him in the earlier stages of its propaganda were not Gujaratis but Punjabis. His movement therefore had taken a much deeper root in the Punjab than in any other province. Even outside the Punjab the Arya Samaj had not to face the same silent prejudices which the Brahmo Samaj provoked all over India, more or less, owing to its being dominated by the Bengalees.

The Theosophical Movement was not an Indian movement. The founders of it were not Indians but Europeans. Educated Indians in the seventies of the last century were still under the spell of Europe. Europe was then our mental guide and moral mentor. We still received our law more or less from Europe. And when two Europeans came to us from across the unknown waters to communicate this strange information that we were the inheritors of an Ancient Wisdom, superior to that of any of the

present great world religions and world cultures, we accepted their message without examination. They were not Indians and consequently the movement which they started, created no provincial jealousies. Though the Theosophical Society was first started in Bombay, it soon became an all-India movement. Theosophical groups were formed almost in every intellectual centre. By the beginning of the eighties the Theosophical Society had covered the Indian continent with quite a large number of branches and affiliated organisations. The Brahmo Samaj was also an all-India movement. It also had its branches and affiliated societies in the different provinces. But for obvious reasons it had not secured that wide public sympathy and support which the Theosophical Movement did. By the beginning of the eighties, as these theosophical organisations were established in different parts of India, the theosophical leaders commenced to convene annual conventions of their members during Christmas recess. The success of these conventions encouraged some of the leaders of our new political life, who were also associated with the Theosophical Movement, to make the experiment of an Indian political Congress which would meet like the Theosophical Convention by turns at the more important cities that had become recognised centres of our public life. The Congress was first convened during Christmas 1885 at Bombay.

Besides the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj and the Theosophical Society, there were other collateral movements also that had been making material contributions to the evolution of modern India. The Brahmo Samaj among us called into being a new literature in Bengal. Raja Ram Mohun Roy, the founder of the Brahmo Samaj, stands also as the father of modern Bengali prose. The Bengali printing press owes its origin to the Christian missionaries of Serampore—Carey, Marshman and Ward. They established the first Bengali printing press and the first Bengali type foundry. Ram Mohun Roy's earlier publications were printed at a missionary press in Calcutta, which used the Bengali types procured from the Serampore foundry. When, however, Ram Mohun Roy got involved in a controversy with the Christian missionaries, the mission press, which had printed his publications

hitherto refused to do so any longer. Ram Mohun was thus forced to start a foundry of his own, and a press outside the control of the Christian missionaries. He was thus practically the founder of the modern Bengali press. Upon the accession of Devendra Nath Tagore to the leadership of the Brahmo Samaj movement, and the establishment of the Tattvabodhini Sabha, and the starting, as its organ, of the *Tattvabodhini Patrika*, the Brahmo Samaj led for many years the movement of the new renaissance in Bengali literature. All the eminent Bengalee men of letters, who have made the modern Bengali literature the premier literature in modern India, namely, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Akshay Kumar Datta, Raj Narain Bose and others, had been members of the Tattvabodhini Sabha in the early part of its life, and were contributors to its journal, the *Tattvabodhini Patrika*. Modern Bengali prose owes no small debt to Devendra Nath himself. Keshub Chunder Sen who, in a sense, succeeded Devendra Nath to the leadership of the Brahmo Samaj from the early sixties of the last century, also holds a very high place in the making of modern Bengali prose. Devendra Nath's family and Keshub Chunder's missionaries contributed very materially in working up of this new renaissance in Bengali literature. Bankim Chandra, who holds a unique place in it, as novelist, essayist, historian and nation-builder, owed a deep debt to the Brahmo Samaj. He worked upon the foundations laid by his predecessors in the field of modern Bengali letters, and the hallmark of Brahmo thought and ideals are unmistakable not only in his works of fiction, but also in his theological and religious essays. Bankim Chandra's story of Shree Krishna followed the main canons of modern scriptural and historical criticism that had been first introduced by the Brahmo Samaj into our Bengalee thought and literature. In building up some sort of a history out of the legends and traditions that had gathered in course of unremembered centuries around the name and character of Shree Krishna in the Hindu books, Bankim Chandra really followed the lead of Renan whose *Life of Jesus Christ* had been at one time a favourite study with the members of the Brahmo Samaj. Cheeranjeeb Sharma, which was the name assumed by one of Keshub's missionaries, Bhai

Trailokya Nath Sanyal, was the first Bengalee non-Christian with a recognised position among Bengalee writers of his generation, to write a life of Jesus Christ, more or less after the line adopted by M. Renan. Bankim Chandra followed more or less the same canons of scriptural criticism in trying to build up a historical account of the life of Shree Krishna in Bengali. Bankim Chandra's commentary of the *Bhagavad Geeta* also followed the line of rational interpretation of ancient scriptures introduced by the Brahmo Samaj among us; while his *Anusheelan Dharma* was openly an essay on the ideals of religious culture so familiar to the Brahmo Samaj in the seventies and early eighties of the last Christian century. The Brahmos had adopted this ideal of "the harmonious development of all the faculties of man, physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual' as the highest object of religion, from Theodore Parker, whose *Sermons* were in those days the most favourite religious book among them. And Bankim Chandra's *Anusheelan Dharma* was really nothing more or less than the religion of the Brahmo Samaj without the Brahmo name. In his interpretations of the *Bhagavad Geeta* he did not blindly follow the older interpreters like, for instance, Samkara or Sreedhara or any others, but sought to bring it into line with the most advanced modern thought. As in his life of Shree Krishna and his *Anusheelan Dharma*, so also in his commentary of the *Geeta*, Bankim Chandra without bodily accepting the teachings of the Brahmo Samaj and, indeed, materially differing from them on many points, was unmistakably influenced by these. Though he declared that personally he did believe in Divine Incarnation, in his study of the life of Shree Krishna he did not advance his personal opinion, but presented him as the most perfect and all-round Ideal Man, who as a human personality only stood far above the incarnations of the different world religions. In fact, he presented the life of Shree Krishna as a practical and objective realisation and revelation of the lofty social idealism of the *Bhagavad Geeta*. Like Ram Mohun, he seems to have had little knowledge and less appreciation of the Vaishnavic thought and culture of the Bengal school. He was therefore forced in seeking to work out a rational synthesis between Hinduism and modern

European thought to practically adopt the exegesis of Christian rationalism or theism of the middle 19th century in Europe that had so profoundly influenced the thought and theology of the Brahmo Samaj in Bengal.

The political conflict arising out of the Ilbert Bill controversy in the eighties immediately brought into being a very large and powerful movement of social and religious reaction and revival. From the establishment of English schools, colleges and universities, the educated intelligentsia of India generally, and of Bengal in a special sense and degree, had been largely dominated by modern European thought and culture. Our religious reform and revival openly followed the line of Unitarian Christianity. Though Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore tried to filiate his new theism to the teachings of the ancient *Vedanta* or the *Upanishads*, the underlying thought and philosophy of the Brahmo Samaj to which he imparted a new life was unmistakably European. Devendra Nath was an Intuitionist. Like the intuitionist School of European, and particularly of British or Scotch, philosophers, Devendra Nath based or built up his theory of the Ultimate Reality or God and the human soul and the necessity of Divine worship and spiritual and ethical culture upon the original intuitions of the human mind. The testimony of these intuitions was as valid in the domain of unseen verities as the testimony of the senses was universally recognised in the realm of the seen or the sensuous. Keshub Chunder in the earlier teachings of his life followed the same line. He openly drew upon Victor Cousin, William Hamilton and Reid in his presentation of the rational basis of the religion of the Brahmo Samaj. Francis Newman, among English Unitarians, and Channing and Parker among Americans, profoundly influenced the theology and religious ideals and disciplines of the Brahmo Samaj under Keshub Chunder Sen. In its social message the Brahmo Samaj consciously or unconsciously followed the advanced social idealism of modern Europe, and particularly of modern England. The Ilbert Bill controversy provoked a most violent and savage attack upon Hindu religious and social institutions by the spokesmen of the European community in India, one of the special privileges of whom was

proposed to be taken away from them by this measure. European British subjects had been placed almost from the beginning of British rule in India outside the jurisdiction of Indian courts over which a native of India presided. European British subjects could only be tried for any criminal offence by a judge or magistrate who was himself a European. The *Libert Bill* proposed to place Indian judges and magistrates of a certain standing on the same level with their European colleagues in regard to this matter. This proposal drove the entire European community into an almost open revolt against the government of Lord Ripon. In defending their special privilege, the Europeans tried to prove the moral inferiority of the people of India to their European fellow subjects. In their attempt to establish their case they cited the institution of Hindu castes, of child marriage and even the so-called idolatry of the Hindus, as evidences of their moral inferiority and the consequent unfitness of any Indian to sit in judgment upon a European accused, however intellectually advanced or whatever official position he may have secured by proved merit and ability in the administration of the country. This violent and prejudiced attack on Hindu religious and social institutions, working upon the universal contrariness of human nature, drove the Hindus to stand up boldly in defence of the institutions which they had at one time regarded as irrational and hurtful and which they had been trying to reform. This was the psychological origin of the movement of social reaction and religious revival among the English-educated Hindus in the eighties of the last century.

This movement received considerable strength from the Theosophical movement on the one side, and in a somewhat modified form from the movement of Dayananda Saraswati in the Punjab, on the other. This reaction brought about by the offensive attack on Hindu society and religion by the spokesmen of the European community in India did not long remain only on the defensive. It soon carried the war into the enemy's camp. In defending the Hindu system of caste, it started comparison with the European and particularly the British system of class distinctions. Human equality and brotherhood was as fundamentally denied by Christian England and Christian Europe

as it was done by caste-ridden India, with this difference however that while the Hindu observed the distinction of caste on what they believed to be religious grounds, the Christian stood up for the equally iniquitous distinctions based on considerations of wealth or rank. The Hindu system of caste was part of the disciplines that led to the development of the Divine in the human through successive births by which a man of the lowest caste in one birth gradually attained through the acquisition of superior spiritual merit the highest Brahminical sanctity in the next or in a subsequent incarnation. Modern biology and particularly the doctrine of hereditary transmission of traits and tendencies was also laid under contribution to lend the support of science to the institution of caste. This was the new exegesis. As regards child marriage, the Hindu revival and reaction defended it on the ground that it contributed to social purity and domestic peace and happiness more than adult marriages familiar to European society, the failure of which was demonstrated by the records of foundling hospitals on the one side, and of divorce courts on the other. This Hindu revival put up a defence of Hindu idolatry from two sides. On the one side, it took up its stand upon the obvious agnosticism of the Vedanta which declared the Ultimate Reality or Brahman to be absolutely unknown and unknowable. This Hindu agnosticism was however different from modern European agnosticism in this, namely, that while the European agnostic denied every possibility for man knowing the Absolute or Brahman, the Hindu agnostic denied this only to man's sense-life and sense-experience. The Absolute could not be apprehended by the senses or comprehended by the mind, which really is itself a sense organ. The mind works upon sense-impressions only. Deduction and induction are both equally based upon man's sense-experiences. So far as these organs of knowledge went, the Ultimate Reality or the Absolute was absolutely beyond their cognisance and therefore unknown and unknowable. But Brahman or the Absolute can be known not through our sense organs but by the direct apprehension of our soul, which itself is beyond cognisance of the senses and the intellect. When the soul is able to completely withdraw itself from all sense contacts and stand by itself in its

own self-consciousness then and then only can it cognise the Over-Soul, not mediately but immediately. This state of supreme abstraction is called the state of *samadhi* in the literature of the Hindus. This *samadhi* can only be reached by complete cessation of all sensation and the absolute elimination of all intellection as well. This supreme concentration or yoga can only be attained by a long and laborious process. In this process of supreme mental concentration the so-called idolatry of the people has a place. The idols so-called are not the real objects of the Hindu's worship; they are merely helps to this process of mental concentration. The idols ultimately, when this complete concentration is attained, serve no useful purpose, and are completely discarded by the illumined sage or seer. This was one kind of apology which this Hindu reaction and revival offered in defence of Hindu idolatry. There was also another line of interpretation. The Hindu boldly denied that this apparent idolatry of his was idolatry at all. Idolatry, strictly speaking, is the worship of natural objects or stocks and stones, and is found, no doubt, among primitive cultures, where these idols or objects are perceived as the very **body** of the Ultimate Reality or the unseen Divinity itself. This is the ~~idolatry~~ of primitive culture. The worship of images and objects in popular Hinduism does not belong to this class. They represent a much later and higher stage of religious and spiritual evolution. ~~This~~ Hindu idolatry is not, strictly speaking, idolatry at all. It is a system of exuberant symbolism. It is not idolatry, but really *ideolatry*. There was also a third school of exegesis which accepted the reality of the gods and goddesses of popular Hindu pantheon, and defended the sensuous forms with which they were clothed by the worshipper in making their images as their real form, made up not of material particles but of spiritual substances, cognised by adepts in their spiritual vision or realisation, which comes to them only when they lose all consciousness of the outer sensuous world in the state of *samadhi*. These were, briefly, the new exegetics and apologetics which were called forth by the Hindu religious reaction and revival that followed the violent attacks on Hindu culture and civilisation by the opponents of the Ilbert Bill.

At the back of this reaction and revival there was undoubtedly a new national self-consciousness and a new pride of race which commenced to openly repudiate the pretensions of European thought and culture to superiority over Hindu thought and life. This social reaction and religious revival possessed the Hindu mind all over India, and offered an effective check, for a time, to our religious and social reform movements. It was not really an honest return to popular or current Hinduism. The motive force behind it was more a determination on the part of our people to assert themselves against the imposition of imported European thoughts and ideals, on the one hand, as it was, on the other, an organised expression of the deep anti-British feeling that had overcome every class and section of the educated community as a result of the open insult which the defenders of class privilege in British Indian policy and administration had offered to their culture and character. This spirit of self-assertion and this growing anti-British feeling materially changed the angle of our thoughts and activities in every department of our life, religious and social, no less political. This was really the beginning of that conflict of cultures and national consciousness that have shaped and moulded to a very large and increasing extent the history and evolution of modern Indian thought and life during the last seventy years and more.

Chapter 2

IN THE ROLE OF A ZEMINDAR



My father's death created a great void in my inner life, and worked a great change in my outer life. Though cut off from my family and the protection of my father from my early youth, the consciousness that I had still the protecting arm of a loving parent over my head was a great moral support to me in all my troubles and privations. I knew it that at the last extremity my father's help, pecuniary and otherwise, would not be refused me. This confidence was justified during the last few days of his life. In the autumn of 1885 my financial position and outlook were almost as dark as dark could be. While I was preparing to come back to my house with my convalescent child from Babu Durga Mohan Das's house in Chowringhee, I hardly could see how I would meet the expenses of my family, however much I might try to keep these down. It was just at this moment that my father called me back. The whole thing was providential. The few days that my father lived on this side after my return home, though marked by great anxiety owing to my wife's serious illness, were however among the happiest days of my conscious life, because during these few days I came to know the depth of father love.

I cannot say that I was overwhelmed by the sudden passing away of my father. His death created immediately such complications in our family life and placed such heavy responsibilities upon my head that I had really no time to nurse the sense of loss which I had suffered. My father breathed his last early in the morning, and we reduced his earthly frame to ashes by noon. As a Brahmo and an outcaste I could not touch even his dead body nor perform the last duties of a Hindu son to his

father at the cremation ground. It was my stepmother who had to light his funeral pyre while I had to stand by. After my return home, the family had been having their food cooked in another house, some little way off from ours. But now that my father was gone, my mother could not possibly go and cook her daily food in another house, nor could she prepare it in her own home as long as I and my wife and children were inmates of it. So I decided to leave home immediately with my convalescent wife, who was hardly able to move about, and my three little children, to Dr. Sundari Mohan Das's house at Habiganj, about three miles away from our home. Dr. Das, however, had really no accommodation for guests, and we had to accommodate ourselves as best as we could in one of his out houses.

When my mother had died ten years previously, the usual disciplines enjoined upon Hindu mourners were imposed upon me from outside by the authority of priests which I did not accept, and of scriptures in which I had no faith. The result was that while I physically submitted to these disciplines, mentally I rebelled against them. But the ten years that had intervened between my mother's and my father's death had slowly revealed to me the meaning and lofty idealism of these Hindu disciplines, and on the death of my father I voluntarily imposed these upon myself. I adopted the usual dress of the Hindu mourner, commenced to go about clad in one single piece of cloth, which was allowed to dry after the daily bath on my own person. I commenced to live on one meal a day, and it consisted of boiled rice and clarified butter without any salt or vegetable, and milk. At night I made my bed on the ground with a piece of blanket for my bedding and another to serve as coverlet. These austerities did not hurt me, because they were self-adopted and supported by sacred sentiments. Every morning I had to walk from Habiganj to our home to look after the family there—my stepmother, my widowed sister and her little girl. At Habiganj I had no domestics because no Hindu of our part would agree to serve a Brahmo and an outcaste like myself. According to the custom of the caste to which my father belonged our mourning lasted for a month or full thirty days. But I had to cut these down in my own case,

because there was no one except myself who could go about among my father's tenantry and collect the rents for meeting the fairly large expenses of his *sradh*. So I performed it in my own way according to Brahmic rites on the sixteenth day after his death, so that I might be free to devote myself more effectively to arrange for what would have to be performed in the old and orthodox way by my stepmother. As befitting my father's position, the Brahmins of the whole countryside were invited by my stepmother—my invitation would not have been accepted by any one to his *sradh*. Friends and relations were also invited. I forget if I was present during this ceremony. I have a faint recollection that I went home from Habiganj only in the afternoon, when the ceremony was over, so that there might be no hitch due to the contamination of my presence during the ceremony at home and the feeding of the Brahmins. This last was not a simple matter, because no true Brahmin would take food prepared in the same kitchen by another; each one of them cooked for himself and his party, and had to be provided with separate kitchens and utensils for the purpose, besides rice, dal, ghee, vegetables and fish, condiments, curd and sweets. It was the privilege of the Brahmin not only to eat as much as he could, but also to waste as much as he liked, for the benefit of the departed soul. I had to find money for all these, though I could not personally supervise anything in connection with my father's *sradh*.

After the *sradh* I did not go back to our ancestral home in the village but continued to reside in Habiganj, daily riding to our village and other villages in my father's zemindary, playing the role of a village zemindar. It was not a role that suited my nature or was really consistent with my religious principles or social ideals. I soon discovered in trying to collect my rent that it was impossible to carry on the duties of a village landlord without resort to little illegalities. Few tenants were found willing to pay unless subjected to gross abuse and more often even to threats of physical chastisement. At first, I tried to pretend to be angry and rude outwardly, while my mind and temper were absolutely unaffected by these. But gradually I discovered that it was impossible to play the tyrant without catching inwardly the temper of the real tyrant. You cannot

assume the outer expressions of anger for any considerable length of time without your mind being tainted by real angry feelings and without your temper being corrupted. All this increased my natural distaste for the new occupation to which I was called, upon the death of my father. My father had greater detachment than myself. His nerves were far more under his control than mine. He could therefore keep himself more or less uncontaminated by his occupation as a zemindar. In fact, for the greater part of his active life he lived in the town, away from his little estate, and he rarely came in direct contact with his tenants. His rents were collected by his agents.

When he retired from his profession as a lawyer and came to live in our ancestral home among his tenantry, he had lost practically all interest in the affairs of his zemindary. Owing to my apostasy he saw no future before himself in regard to his estate and his status in the village and the community to which he belonged. He never cared to realise from his tenants more than what was absolutely necessary for his modest wants. When I went into the accounts of his tenants, I found that these had never been made up for the previous ten years in many cases, though small collections had been made from time to time on account. In every zemindary there are good tenants and bad, the few who willingly and honestly pay up their dues and the many who try to evade payment as much and for as long a period as they can. My trouble was with these. They had the wherewithal to pay their rents but would not do so, pretending poverty. In these cases I had very frequently to resort to shouting and abusing and not infrequently even to order my peons to prevent their leaving my office or *kutchery* without clearing their dues. This was clearly illegal. It was wrongful confinement. I did not like it. But I had no help, if I wanted to realise my lawful dues.

About this time some little difference arose between the sub-divisional officer at Habiganj and myself over an election to the Local Board. I was a candidate; my rival was a neighbouring zemindar, a much richer man than myself. The sub-divisional Officer, naturally enough, did not favour my election. I was much too independent and inconveniently enlightened a man about

town for him. Besides, my profession as a journalist was counted as a crime. So he managed to defeat my candidature. It was really no election at all; there was no polling, no casting or counting of votes. The people of a few neighbouring villages were invited to a meeting in the house of my rival candidate. The sub-divisional Officer practically presided over that meeting, and in his own way tried to ascertain the wishes of the people regarding their representative on the Local Board. He sent in a report in favour of my rival. I entered an emphatic protest against this procedure, and particularly against the obvious partiality with which the S.D.O. had managed this so-called election. All this created some little bad blood between the S.D.O. and myself. And I soon felt that it would be a very risky business for me to try to manage my father's estate with all the little illegalities involved in its management in view of my relations with the S.D.O. who was reputed to be a 'very dangerous' man, an expert in various kinds of intrigues, and who at any moment might manage to procure a complaint against me from any of my tenants under the Penal Code for assault or wrongful restraint, and might easily trap me into prison.

My father's was a small estate. Though as the revenue was paid direct to the government, he was a zemindar as much as the biggest landlord. Under the existing land laws of the province, the total rental was not more than Rs. 3,000 a year at the outside. It was impossible therefore to manage this small estate through agents, while I might live away from my tenantry at Sylhet or in Calcutta. In the next place, at the time of my father's death it was heavily encumbered. It was mortgaged for an original loan of Rs. 3,000, but this debt had run up to a total of more than Rs. 14,000 when I inherited it. The property, though yielding a small income then, had a great future before it, and in course of time it was reasonably expected that it would yield more than five times the income which I was getting from it. The party who held the mortgage was naturally willing to let it go on, and on the death of my father very generously sent word to me that he had no idea of pressing me for the payment of the debt; only he would want a renewal of the bond. His motive was obvious, namely

to take up the whole property gradually to meet his demand, leaving in the course of a few years not a penny for me out of the sale proceeds of the estate. His generosity made no appeal to me. This was another reason that led me to dispose of my inheritance as soon as I could do so.

Almost immediately after my father's death the post of assistant headmaster of the Habiganj High English School fell vacant, and the committee offered it to me. I accepted it readily with the idea that it would first give me a congenial occupation and thus help me to live in my own village, and next, that the small emolument which it would bring me would help to meet practically all the current expenses for my family. This would enable me to allow the greater portion of the rental to be devoted to the clearance of the big mortgage. But my appointment did not meet with the favour of the sub-divisional officer, and it failed to be confirmed by the higher authorities of the Education Department. The school was not a government school; it was an 'aided' institution, and under the regulations of grants-in-aid, appointments to the higher posts, though made by the School Committee, had to be confirmed by the head of the Education Department in the province. The School Committee felt aggrieved at the action of the Education Department. They knew that this was really the doing of the sub-divisional officer and the headmaster of the school, who were both from Dacca. The suspicion therefore was natural that the sub-divisional officer and the headmaster had joined hands in defeating the selection of the School Committee and keeping me out. The action of the Education Department worked upon my feelings also; and as a reply to it I started a high English school almost immediately. I had built a fairly good-sized bungalow for myself when I was still in the service of the Habiganj school. But the climate did not suit my children, and the social difficulties also forced me to give up the idea of permanently settling at Habiganj. This bungalow was put to the use of the new school. Brahmo friends from shillong and Sylhet came to help me in the management of this School. But I could not keep it up. It worked for only one session. I forget how many students were sent up for the university entrance

examination from this school; but I remember that one of our boys passed this examination. The experiment cost me Rs. 5,000. My intention was to maintain this School as a memorial to my father. It was named after him. But my original motive was not pure. I launched this enterprise out of pique. I was determined in doing this to destroy the old school at Habiganj. Looking back upon that experience I soon came to realise it that the real cause of my failure was the malicious motive that had instigated me in starting this school.

With the failure of this experiment my desire to live in Habiganj also waned. The illness of my children found me an excuse for giving up the idea altogether. As I could not live at Habiganj, it became evident that I could not possibly keep my father's estate also. So I sold it. It was not big enough to induce any outsider to buy it. It was not sufficiently small either to tempt local buyers. Under these circumstances it did not fetch more than half its normal value. But I had to be satisfied with it. Having disposed of it, and clearing all my father's debt, I left Habiganj for good in the autumn of 1885, and came back to Calcutta.

I lived here now practically on the sale proceeds of my father's estate. It was not much. But it was sufficient to free me from all anxieties for my daily bread. I could now resume my previous journalistic connections. The *Bharat Mihir* for which I used to write during 1884-85 had, if I remember aright, ceased publication or, in any case, was no longer able to pay for its contributors. The *Bangabasee* had developed such strong reactionary proclivities, not only in social and religious matters but even in politics, that it was no longer possible for me to be associated with it even as an independent contributor. For some months I did nothing except lecturing and preaching mainly under the auspices of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj.

Chapter 3

SECOND SESSION OF THE CONGRESS

A few months after my return to Calcutta, during Christmas 1886, the second session of the Indian National Congress was held here. The first Congress had been a very small affair. Bengal was not properly represented in it. The real leaders of Bengal politics in those days were Surendra Nath Banerjee and Ananda Mohan Bose. Surendra Nath was the first to dream of an all-India political agitation. In 1883 a National Conference had been convened in Calcutta on the invitation of the Indian Association, of which Surendra Nath was the very life and soul. In 1885 again this conference was held in the Albert Hall, Calcutta, at the same time when the Indian National Congress was being held in Bombay with Mr. W.C. Bonnerjee as president. Mr. Bonnerjee did not belong to the Indian Association. He never appreciated the labours of Surendra Nath. In fact, it was an open secret in those days that Mr. Bonnerjee was not in favour of inviting Surendra Nath and the leaders of the Indian Association to the first session of the Congress in Bombay. Mr. A.O. Hume who is recognised as the 'father' of the Indian National Congress, had been an official, a member of the Indian Civil Service, and naturally therefore shared the strong prejudices of his service against Surendra Nath and his politics. After the Congress of Bombay, Mr. Hume came to Calcutta to organise the next session of the Congress that was to be held here. And he soon discovered the impossibility of enlisting the sympathies and active cooperation of politically-minded and educated Bengal if Surendra Nath was left out of the counsels of the Congress. He therefore called upon Surendra Nath and induced him to join the Congress. The Congress of 1886 was a bigger affair than the first Congress in Bombay. It was more

representative and more largely attended than the first Congress in Bombay. Mr. Dadabhai Naoroji was invited to preside over it. The meetings were held in the Calcutta Town Hall. The necessity of building special pandals had not as yet arisen. Delegates were elected by public meetings held in different district headquarters. I was elected from my native district of Sylhet. The Congress had as yet no constitution, and a few leading men with Mr. Hume at their head made all the arrangements for it, including the settlement of the programme of the public session. But Bengal had, as a result of the activities of Surendra Nath, Ananda Mohan and others of the Indian Association, developed a certain degree of democratic consciousness. On the eve of the public session of the Congress, the Bengal delegates therefore met in the hall of Surendra Nath's college, the Ripon College, in Mirzapore Street, to discuss and settle a concerted plan of action. Babu Sambhu Chandra Mukherjee, the oldest living publicist of Bengal, presided over this meeting, which was attended by practically all the Bengal delegates. There were certain questions in which Bengal was very keenly interested, and this meeting decided to take concerted action at the open session of the Congress in regard to these matters. One of these was the condition of tea garden labour in Sylhet and Assam. When this subject came up for discussion before this conference, Babu Sambhu Chandra Mukherjee who seemed to have taken a fancy to me from the day about two years previously when I had opposed at a meeting of the Savitree Library Babu Akshay Chandra Sarker's paper against the re-marriage of Hindu widows, referred to me as "the delegate from Sylhet" for my opinion. It took me by surprise, because I did not know that Mr. Mukherjee knew me and had marked me out from that meeting of the Savitree Library. I have no recollection of the details or the decision of this preliminary conference of Bengal delegates except this that Dr. Rajendra Lal Mittra, Chairman of the Reception Committee, who was also present, put in a strong plea for the Bengal delegates taking a definite stand at the Congress for adequate representation of the view of Bengal and to claim their legitimate share in the direction and control of the new national organisation. He said that, "We cannot join the Congress to play the role of the bearer of the hubble-bubble (*hukka-bardar*) of anybody else".

In those days Congress leadership had already commenced to develop autocratic tendencies. The programme of the Congress used to be settled by half a dozen leading men, the great bulk of the delegates being expected to accept the resolutions as drafted by them without criticism, much less protest. Mr. Nagendra Nath Ghosh, the editor of the *Indian Nation*, another independent publicist among us, condemned the whole proceedings of the Congress of 1886 as being conducted in a "hole and corner way" by a handful of men. The scheme, however, failed to work smoothly in Calcutta, and there was a very lively discussion over one of the resolutions which was opposed by a large section of the Bengal delegates. This resolution asked for the extension of the system of jury trial, and the abolition of the revisional powers of the High Court in the matter of the verdict of a jury, particularly of the Calcutta High Court, passed on Europeans accused of serious crimes. European jurors brought in what the Bengali Press characterised as "perverse verdicts" in almost all these cases. The High Court judiciary commanded much greater confidence, and Bengal was opposed to depriving the High Court of its revisional powers in regard to jury trials. This resolution was opposed by Mr. Kali Charan Banerjee. I also spoke on it. But though Bengal was practically with us, the votes of the other provinces helped to carry this resolution against us. This was my first introduction to the political leaders of the other provinces. Among these the Mahratta delegates from Poona, if my memory fails me not, supported us on this question. Bal Gangadhar Tilak had not as yet come to the front in all-India politics. I think he was not even present at the Calcutta Congress of 1886. The leader of Mahratta politics then was Mr. Chiplunkar. But I forget if he attended the Calcutta session of the Congress of 1886. Mr. Nam Joshi, at that time the editor of the "Mahratta" and Mr. Chiplunkar's right-hand man, was present. I made his acquaintance then, an acquaintance that soon ripened into friendship. We worked together in the Congress of Madras next year, a few days after which Nam Joshi was prematurely called away from the field of his earthly labours. Bengal's alliance with Maharashtra thus started much earlier than the Swadeshi and Boycott movement of the early years of the present century.

Chapter 4

WITH THE *TRIBUNE* OF LAHORE



The greater part of 1887 was spent by me in Calcutta, where I resumed my literary labours. 1887 was the Jubilee Year of Queen Victoria's reign, and I was moved to take advantage of it to write a biography of Her Majesty. The life of Victoria made a strong appeal to me on account of her character far more than because of her high position as the head of the British Empire. In writing that book I had to read up a good deal of the literature of her times. Grey's *Life of the Prince Consort*, Justin Macarthy's *History of Our Times*, Grenville's *Journal* were among the principal books which I had to study in preparing this biography of the Queen. It was, I think, the first and ~~still~~ is the only Bengalee biography, besides small school books, of her late Majesty. I published it myself, and though it cost me nearly a thousand rupees I was not a loser by this venture. In the beginning of this year I wrote another small biography, the life of Babu Pramada Charan Sen, the editor of the first Bengalee journal specially written for our juvenile population, the *Sakha*. Pramada Charan had been an intimate friend of mine. He gave promise of a brilliant and useful career in the field of literature and journalism in Bengal. His life was however cut short in early youth by pthisis. Though I did not write for the *Sakha*, Pramada Charan was associated with another literary venture with which I was intimately connected, the Bengalee monthly *Alochana*. My life of Pramada Charan was meant to be a memorial volume, a tribute of his friends to him. It passed through one edition only.

In October 1887 I was able, by the grace of God, to secure an engagement at Lahore as sub-editor of the *Tribune*. The

Tribune had been started some years before as an English weekly. Sardar Dayal Singh Majhithia financed it. Babu Seetal Chandra Mukherjee was its first editor. Babu Seetal Chandra belonged to Calcutta or, more accurately to Bhowanipore, the southern suburb of that city. But he lived at this time in Allahabad, where he had started an English weekly, *The People*. From Allahabad he edited the *Tribune*. Babu Seetalakanta Chatterjee went to Lahore as his local sub-editor on the *Tribune*. Seetalakanta came of a high caste Brahmin family of Bikrampur, Dacca. His elder brother Babu Nabakanta Chatterjee came under the influence of Keshub Chunder Sen in his early youth and joined the Brahmo Samaj. Nabakanta's younger brother Nishikanta Chatterjee secured a Gilchrist Scholarship and went to England from where he went to Germany and secured the doctorate degree of a German university. Seetalakanta was the youngest of these brothers. They were an exceptionally gifted family. Seetalakanta had, before going to Lahore, acquired fair recognition as a promising Bengalee poet. His ambition was to follow his brother Nishikanta to England. If I remember aright he competed for the Gilchrist Scholarship once or twice, but unfortunately failed to secure it. This ambition interfered with his career in the Calcutta University. He gave up his studies in the university before taking his degree and applied himself to literature and journalism. Sardar Dayal Singh was a great admirer of Surendra Nath and Ananda Mohan. In those days he was regarded as a member of the Brahmo Samaj. The Brahmo Samaj in Lahore received substantial financial help from him. The Bengalee community in Lahore induced Sardar Dayal Singh to start the *Tribune*. Babu Pratul Chandra Chatterjee was then one of the leaders of the Chief Court Bar in Lahore. Another leader of it was Babu Kaliprasanna Roy. Babu Jogendra Chandra Basu was a comparatively junior member of the Bar. These three were intimately associated with Sardar Dayal Singh in many of his public activities, specially the *Tribune*. Seetalkanta went to Lahore to be practically in charge of the paper on the recommendation of Surendra Nath Banerjee and Ananda Mohan Bose. In 1887 he was in sole editorial charge of the paper, Seetal Chandra Mukherjee having retired from that

responsibility, though continuing still to be its chief leader-writer. By this time the *Tribune* had become tri-weekly and it was not possible to run a tri-weekly paper with an editor living in a distant town. This was the reason for the reorganisation of the paper which led to the appointment of Seetalakanta as editor. They wanted another man for the staff of the paper, and I secured this post.

I enthusiastically accepted it for two reasons; first financial, because for nearly a year and a half I had been living on the little the little capital that I had received as the price of my legacy in my father's estate. I was anxious naturally to keep the balance of it intact. This post in Lahore offered me this opportunity. The second reason was my life-long journalistic and literary predilections. After the Bengal Public Opinion ceased independent publication, I lost touch with English journalism. The *Tribune* offered me an excellent opportunity to resume my connection with English journalism. Last of all, the spirit of the wanderer had always been in me; and here was a splendid opportunity to see new places and gather new experiences. I left Calcutta with my wife and children for Lahore. I had no idea of breaking journey on the way. But Providence ordained otherwise. Arriving at Ambala early in the morning I found the line blocked owing to a very terrible accident, which had occurred a few hours previously. A bridge had given way, and practically the whole train, I think it was a passenger train, had precipitated down the embankment to the bed of the river. It would take a pretty long time to repair the bridge and resume the usual traffic. The railway authorities informed me that I could either go on and manage to tranship myself to the other side of the bridge where I would find a direct train to Lahore, or wait at Ambala until the line was repaired, or turn back to Delhi from where I could go to Lahore by another line, via Rewari and Ferozepore. I chose the last alternative; returned to Delhi and made a halt there for three or four days in a hotel run on English lines by an Indian butler, seeing sights of this historic city. In this way I at last reached Lahore after about ten days. I had known Seetalakanta and gladly accepted his hospitality until I found a house for myself.

At Lahore I was cordially welcomed by the local Brahmo Samaj. Abinash Chandra Majumdar, whose memory is still held with regard and affection not only by the Bengalee community of Lahore but by the entire educated Indian community of that city, was the secretary of the Samaj at that time. He was employed in the head office of the North Western Railway. Another prominent member of the Brahmo Samaj was Ram Chandra Banerjee, who also was employed in the same office. Nabin Chandra Roy had founded the Punjab Brahmo Samaj. His last appointment was as Registrar of the Oriental University, which was the name of the Punjab University then. On the retirement of Nabin Chandra Roy, Chandra Nath Bose, Abinash Chandra Majumdar's father-in-law, succeeded him as registrar of the university. Pandit Sivnarayan Agnihotri was one of the first batch of missionaries ordained by the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. A powerful personality, a fascinating Urdu and Hindi orator, Pandit Agnihotri had at one time been the leader of the Brahmo Samaj in the Punjab. His militant Brahmo propaganda soon brought him into conflict with the Arya Samaj. I had known Pandit Agnihotri intimately in Calcutta. But when I went to Lahore, Pandit Agnihotri had been rapidly drifting away from the ideals of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. He had already resigned his connection with the Samaj as its missionary. He had also cut himself off from the ministry of the Punjab Brahmo Samaj. He had started a new line of religious and spiritual life, which gradually developed into a new movement in the Punjab under the name of the Dev Samaj. Pandit Agnihotri subsequently became the head of this new movement under the name of Dev-Guru. But in 1887 Pandit Agnihotri had not entirely cut himself off from the Brahmo Samaj though his undoubted pontifical tendencies had commenced to alienate him from his old associates in the Brahmo Samaj movement.

Within a few days of my taking up the duties of my new post as sub-editor of the *Tribune*, the editor Seetalakanta Chatterjee went on leave, and I was placed in editorial charge of the paper. For five months I conducted the *Tribune*, and along with it found large opportunities of service to the Brahmo Samaj also as minister and lecturer. At this time I lived in a small bungalow just opposite the house of Babu Pratul Chandra Chatterjee, near the

Government College. As we observed neither caste nor zenana we soon made friends with the progressive section of the Lahore community, both Brahmo and Christian. The late Miss Mona Bose was then the headmistress of the Lahore Government Girls' School. Her elder sister, Mrs. Dutt, whose husband had become a convert from the well-known Dutt family of Hatkhola (Calcutta), was living with her at that time. Miss Leela Singh, who subsequently married Principal Rudra of the Christian College at Delhi, was an assistant of Miss Bose. Mrs Dutt was the mother of Dr. S.K. Dutt, the well-known and universally respected secretary of the Y.M.C.A., and I saw him as a boy with his mother. Mr. Raha, who was then in charge of the Bible and Tract Society's Depot in Lahore, was a frequent visitor to our house. Besides these Christian friends, we came to know during our sojourn in Lahore the late Mr Sevaram, the son of the millionaire Rai Bahadur Kanayaha Lal. Sevaram went to England with his wife and his widowed sister to finish his education. He helped the latter to remarry Mr Roshanlal, Bar-at-law. This was against the wishes of his father and it created a painful misunderstanding between father and son. On his return to Lahore Sevaram was put out of caste by his people. He did not like to throw himself into the company of foreigners adopting their way of life. Sevaram therefore welcomed our society and the two families soon became fairly intimate notwithstanding the very wide gulf between them in their financial position. In this way, though a poor journalist, I found myself at Lahore drawn into intimate fellowship with practically the whole of the advanced section of the Indian community of the place. The *Tribune* also rose very considerably in public estimation during the four or five months that I was in sole editorial charge of it. This was entirely due to my passion for writing which led me to write practically the whole paper myself, leaving only the news columns in charge of my two sub-editors. Seetalakanta never did it. He lacked the passion that I always have had for literary work. My sub-editors, naturally enough, did not quite like my doing every bit of original writing myself leaving them, however unconsciously it might be, no scope for the satisfaction of their literary passion or journalistic ambitions.

This perhaps was the reason why the *Tribune* attracted more public attention during the time I was in editorial charge of it than it had done before. On his return from leave Seetalakanta redistributed the work of the paper, placing me in charge of the final proofs and supervision of the day's collection. These were really not the duties of a sub-editor. I did not like to accept these; consequently I resigned.

The news of my resignation soon spread among the public men of the city. Somehow or other, I did not know exactly why, Seetalakanta was not very popular at the time with the leaders of public opinion in the city, particularly the Bengalee group. Seetalakanta was rather slow to mix with the local leaders, both Bengalee and Punjabee. He was not rich compared to them but he had aristocratic connections. His family at Bikrampur had been recognised leaders of their society. After cutting himself off from them by joining the Brahmo Samaj with his elder brother, Seetalakanta married a granddaughter of Devendra Nath Tagore. Personally he always had a high opinion of his own intellectual endowments and culture. These perhaps combined to create an aloofness in his conduct and conversation which was not conducive to the formation of cordial social relations with the leaders of the educated community of Lahore. All these must have worked up the psychology which contributed so largely to my popularity with the leaders of public opinion, though I also never went out of my way to cultivate them. On hearing of my resignation from the *Tribune* Babu Pratul Chandra Chatterjee came to see me. He said that those who had been with Sardar Dayal Singh in starting this paper were naturally interested in its welfare. They appreciated my work on the *Tribune* during the few months that I had been in editorial charge of it. They were not only sorry but sincerely concerned to hear that the *Tribune* would not have my services any longer. And he came to see me on behalf of his friends to induce me to continue my connection with it. I frankly explained the whole situation to him. He asked me if I had told Sardar Dayal Singh the reasons of my resignation. I said, "No". I had no desire to pick up a quarrel with the editor, nor to create a misunderstanding between him and his employer. As the work

no longer suited me I wanted to be relieved of it. Babu Pratul Chandra said that in keeping back the reasons of my resignation from Sardar Dayal Singh I was not only doing an injustice to him but also to the *Tribune* and the large body of its readers, who appreciated my writings. He asked me to see Sardar Dayal Singh about it. I replied that I had sent in my resignation and I could not consistently with my self-respect go and see the proprietor of the paper upon a matter that might be interpreted as preferring a complaint against the editor. Babu Pratul Chandra asked me if I would refuse to see the Sardar even if he wanted to see me. I said, "How could I refuse an invitation coming from one gentleman to another?" Babu Pratul Chandra, it seems, went straight from my house to Sardar Dayal Singh, and as I presume, told him all that I had said. The next morning I received a letter from the Sardar Saheb, asking me to see him, which I did. He urged me to withdraw my resignation, assuring me that he would see to it that my grievances were at once removed. I **did** not like the idea of a proprietor of a paper interfering in this way with the freedom of its editor even though such interference **was** in my favour. I told Sardar Dayal Singh that his interference **in** a matter like this would be bound to be resented by his editor, and knowing the mentality of Seetalakanta as I did, I feared **that** he would refuse to continue in the service of the *Tribune* if **the** Sardar did what he wanted to do to keep me in his service; and I could not be a party to the severance of the connection of Seetalakanta with the *Tribune*. So I did not withdraw my resignation, and the Sardar evidently accepted the reasonableness of my action.

I left Lahore in August, 1888. I liked my work in Lahore. I had made many friends during my residence there. In the Brahmo Samaj I had found myself at home with almost every member of it. Babu Abinash Chandra Majumdar and Babu Ram Chandra Bannerjee were the most intimate among them. Abinash Chandra gradually rose to considerable distinction as a public worker after his retirement from office. He was a man of great tact and force of character. He was associated with every public movement in Lahore. He was among the very few members of the Punjab Brahmo Samaj who carried out the social ideals of the Samaj,

thereby cutting himself off completely from the old and orthodox Hindu community. This was no easy thing for him to do, because he was very highly connected. He had married, before he joined the Brahmo Samaj, a daughter of Babu Chandra Nath Bose, who held a high position in the Bengalee community of Lahore as Pandit Nabin Chandra Roy's successor in the office of the Registrar of the Lahore University. In fact, when I was in Lahore during 1887-88 I did not feel assured that Babu Abinash Chandra Majumdar would court excommunication by joining the Brahmo community. He had no call till then to openly break away from his family and relations in the Hindu society. He was a Kayastha and therefore had not to throw off his sacred thread, which was the cause of many a Brahmin member of the Samaj to be expelled from the parent community. He had only one child, a girl, of about eight years old. The question of her marriage stood far away; he sent her to school and gradually when she grew up and passed all the examinations of the Lahore University it was no longer possible to think of giving her in marriage in the old orthodox community. In this way Babu Abinash Chandra within a few years of my leaving Lahore found himself and his family inside the Brahmo community. Later on, he was ordained as a missionary of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. His death was universally mourned as a great loss not only to the Brahmo Samaj but to the general public life of the Punjab. He was not only a pillar of the Brahmo Samaj in the Punjab but one of the trustees of the *Tribune* and the Dayal Singh College.

Ram Chandra Bannerji had been baptised as a Christian. He had married the daughter of a leading Christian gentleman of Gujranwala, who was himself a Bengalee Brahmin and a convert to Christianity. Ram Chandra was one of the gentlest and purest souls that I have come across in my life. He was not a public man; he had no ambition that way. He was fully satisfied with serving his family and the Brahmo Samaj in any way that opened before him. There was another Brahmo family with whom also we were very friendly and familiar during our sojourn in Lahore. The head of this family Madhu Sudan Sarker was also employed, like Ram Chandra and Abinash Chandra, in the N.W.

Railway office. All these made a small but very friendly Brahmo community in Lahore. Then, there were also a few Punjabee gentlemen with whom I had become very intimate. They were almost all of them employed in the same office as Abinash Chandra and Ram Chandra. Prominent among them were two brothers, Lala Madhoram and Vissendas. Though not members of the Brahmo community, they were members of the Lahore Brahmo Samaj, and though they did not openly cut themselves off from the Hindu communion, they were not in any sense of the term orthodox either in their views or in their ways of life. There were two other Brahmos, not of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, but of the New Dispensation, whose friendship I had won. They were Lala Kashiram and Mr Gunda Mal. They were both *anushtanic* Brahmos, who had cut themselves off from the old Hindu community. Lala Kashiram was one of the most loyal followers of Keshub Chunder Sen, but the Punjab Brahmo Samaj kept itself free from the partisanship that prevailed in Calcutta among the members of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj and the followers of Keshub Chunder Sen. Though member of the New Dispensation, both of them were among the ministers of the Lahore Brahmo Samaj.

We were also very intimate with a leading Christian gentleman of Lahore, Mr Raha, who was the curator of the Lahore Bible Depot. Mr Raha was a remarkable character; he was a bachelor who loved to spend his income upon other people's children, bringing them up at his own expense. Naturally enough, I did not like to leave Lahore; but a serious spell of illness of my second daughter and the delicate state of health of my wife compelled me to return to Calcutta where within a few days of my return, in August, 1888, my son Niranjan was born.

Chapter 5

SUBJECTS COMMITTEE OF THE CONGRESS



The third session of the Congress was held in Madras during Christmas of 1887. A few days before this Babu Seetalakanta had returned from his leave, and I was released of the editorial charge of the paper, *The Tribune*. I was eager to attend the Congress, and applied for a fortnight's leave which was granted. I left for Madras about the third week of December, 1887. On my way Mr Nam Joshi joined me at Poona and we two travelled together to Madras.

The manner in which the programme of the Congress had been settled in Calcutta in 1886 had provoked, particularly in Bengal, some serious criticism. Like Bengal, Maharashtra also did not like the hole and corner way of managing the Congress. While we were going to Madras Mr Nam Joshi and myself conspired together to change all this. The proper way to do it was for the open session of the Congress to appoint a representative committee charged with all the executive functions of the Congress, which would settle the programme of its public business. I was not as yet known to Mr Hume, but Mr Nam Joshi was. And it was decided that immediately upon our arrival in Madras Mr Nam Joshi would go and see Mr. Hume and place this proposal before him. This was done, but did not receive the serious attention of the General Secretary. As in the previous year so this year also a few leading men met at Mr Hume's residence and drew up a programme for the consideration of the Congress, or more correctly, for the formal registration of the different resolutions drafted by these leaders. Most of the

Bengal delegates were accommodated in the same bungalow. Mr Sankaran Nair, at that time a junior *vakil* in the High Court, was placed in charge of our hospitality. Mr Surendra Nath Banerjee, Mr Narendra Nath Sen (Editor, *Indian Mirror*), Dr Trailokya Nath Mitra, a leading *vakil* of the Calcutta High Court, Babu Guruprasad Sen, the leader of Bihar and secretary of the Bihar Landholders' Association, Babu Dwarkanath Ganguly, asst. secretary of the Indian Association, and a few others including myself, were accommodated here. The evening before the public session the leaders had a meeting in Mr Hume's bungalow, and the programme was settled there, as noted. When the Bengal leaders came back, we asked them what was to be the programme of the next day. One of them, I think Mr Surendra Nath Banerjee, said that the programme had been settled. This was the signal for a combined attack on them. "Who settled them?" we asked, "We did," was the reply. "But, who are these we?" we asked. One of them replied, "Mr W.C. Bonnerjee, Mr Guruprasad Sen, Mr Narendra Nath Sen, Dr. Trailokya Nath Mitra, Mr Surendra Nath Banerjee and others from Bengal." "But what was their authority?" This question staggered our friends. They saw that they had no authority to decide anything on behalf of their brother delegates from Bengal. Mr Surendra Nath Banerjee with his characteristic readiness to conciliate reasonable opposition, replied that the programme would not be finally settled until it had been considered and approved by us. He promised to send the draft next morning for our consideration and approval. So peace was secured in the Bengal camp for the night.

The next morning, however, did not fulfil Surendra Nath's promise or our expectation. No draft programme came and there was considerable excitement among the rank and file of the Bengal delegates, led by Babu Dwarkanath Ganguly, who was a sturdy opponent of all forms of autocracy, whether in the Brahmo Samaj of which he was a prominent member, or in politics. When we went to the *pandal* at noon we found the resolutions printed and being circulated to the assembled crowd. There was a note appended to these resolutions that declared

that after these resolutions had been considered and disposed of any delegate might propose any other resolution.

As soon as I saw this notice I went with it to see Mr Nam Joshi who along with the other Bombay delegates had been accommodated in a building near the *pandal*. Placing this printed paper in his hands I asked him if he had seen it and told him in an excited tone that I would not stand all this, that as soon as the president closed his opening address, I would stand up and move a resolution and challenge this notice, and I would like to see who would put me down; I did not travel from Lahore to Madras at my expense, a duly elected delegate, simply to register what these esteemable gentlemen decided.

Justice Ranade happened at that time to be in Mr Nam Joshi's room. Seeing my excitement he called me to his side and wanted to know what was the matter. I explained to him how we were being treated by Mr Hume and his friends. Mr Nam Joshi had gone to Mr Hume with our complaint against the hole and corner way in which the programme of the previous Congress in Calcutta had been settled, praying for the adoption of more democratic methods in the management of the Congress. But Mr Hume had treated our complaint with ill-concealed contempt. He and his friends in this noticed threw out an open challenge to us. I at least was not going to take it lying down, but would place the whole issue before the open Congress and publicly question the authority of this anonymous notice. Ranade was one of the few far-seeing statesmen and wide-awake politicians that India had produced in modern times. With characteristic sweet reasonableness he at once realised the force of my case and said: "A great wrong has been done, I frankly admit. But what is the remedy? Can't you suggest some other way by which this wrong can be righted without causing a conflict with the authors of it in the open Congress and creating a public scandal for the amusement of our enemies?" I replied: "There is a way still open to Mr Hume and his friends to get out of the mess." "What is it," Mr Ranade asked. "If after delivering his opening address the president will move the appointment of a representative committee and refer the draft resolutions to it, and the programme

as settled by this committee be the authoritative procedure of business of this Congress, and having secured the appointment of this committee, if the president will adjourn the Congress for the day, the wrong that has been done may be righted." Mr. Ranade immediately fell in with this idea, and promising to see to it that this was done, he asked me to get him a list of the representatives from Bengal who would be elected on this committee. I said that I would consult the Bengal delegates and presently place a list in his hands. I went out, and in consultation with my friends made out a list. It contained no new name, but nominated the very men who had been invited by Mr Hume to his private meeting the previous night. This proved that we were fighting not for personalities but for a principle. I think the same procedure was adopted in regard to the Bombay delegates also. Mr Ranade induced Mr Hume and others to adopt the course suggested. Immediately after closing his address the President, Mr Badruddin Tyabji, moved the appointment of the representative committee, which henceforward became a part and parcel of the constitution of the Congress under the name and style of the Subjects Committee. This Subjects Committee was the executive of the Congress until 1906, when the All-India Congress Committee was constituted as the permanent executive of the Congress between one session of it and another, while the Subjects Committee continued to function as before during the sittings of the Congress settling the programme of work and drafting resolutions for the consideration of the open session.

Chapter 6

FOURTH SESSION OF THE CONGRESS

The year 1888 was marked by a new development in Indian politics and by the changed attitude of the Government towards the Indian National Congress. Lord Dufferin had encouraged Mr. Hume's idea of organising this political movement. He was a far-seeing diplomat, if not indeed a statesman. He saw that unless the new political forces in the country could be harnessed to the chariot-wheel of the British administration, the future of the British Empire in India would be bound to be troublous. The educated Indians aspired naturally to be in India as the British people were in their own country. These aspirations could not be suppressed, and if allowed to develop without proper guidance, they would be bound to breed forces of discontent that might lead to continental insurrection or revolt. The problem before the British statesmen in India was how to prevent this possible and dangerous development. So when Mr Hume placed his idea of organising a National Congress that would bring upon a common platform the different groups of Indian politicians in all the provinces, it at once appealed to Lord Dufferin, particularly as this new organisation would be guided by so able and experienced an administrator as Mr Hume.

Before his retirement from office Mr Hume had joined the Theosophical movement which had already captured many leading Indians. Colonel Olcott and Madame Blavatsky, the two high-priests of this movement, having secured a fair number of adherents to their cause in the different provinces of India, naturally wanted to knit them together into a living all-India

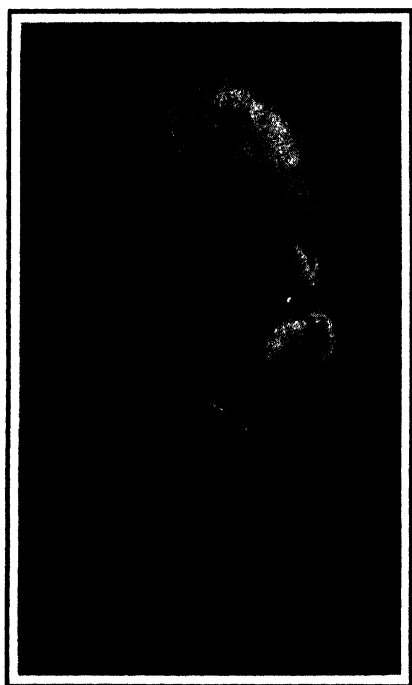


fraternity. For this purpose as stated, an annual convention of the members of the Theosophical Society from all parts of India used to be invited during Christmas. This Theosophical Convention possibly inspired Mr Hume with the idea of an all-India political convention which came later on to be called the Indian National Congress. The first Congress was held in Bombay during Christmas 1885, I think about the same time when the Theosophists held their convention in that city. The next Congress was held, as I have said, in Calcutta, and the third in Madras in 1887. The Congress in Madras was openly received by Lord Connemare, the then Governor of that Presidency, who invited the delegates from other provinces to a garden party in Government House. His Excellency did not attend the session of the Congress; but I think all the secretaries of the Madras government and many high officials were present as distinguished visitors.

The Madras Congress also took a new step in trying to organise Congress work among the masses of that presidency. This frightened the officials, perhaps not so much of that province as of the other provinces, particularly of the United Provinces. The officials of Upper India had not as yet completely forgotten the episode of the Mutiny. They were therefore naturally nervous regarding the future of the new political upheaval represented by the Congress. As long as this new movement was confined to the educated middle-class it might be safe, but if it went to the ignorant and easily inflammable masses, as they called the great body of population in the country, nobody could say what might or might not happen. Even Mr. Hume himself was not free from these apprehensions. At the Madras Congress he stoutly opposed the resolution calling for the repeal of the Arms Act. When I saw him in Calcutta next year he frankly told me that no Englishman who had seen the horrors of the Mutiny, as he had done, could support the prayer of the Congress for the repeal of the Arms Act. Sir Auckland Colvin was at that time the Lieutenant-Governor in U.P. and he threw off the usual official reserve and in his panic at the commencement of a mass political movement under the auspices of the Congress which had been started in Madras, entered a strong protest against it through the columns of the



NAGENDRA NATH CHATTERJEE.



DWARKA NATH GANGULY



JAY GOVINDA SHOME

Press. Thus was started a controversy between Sir Auckland and Mr Hume, which formed one of the historic events of 1888.

The year was also marked by another development in Indian politics, namely, an organised movement led by Sir Syed Ahmad to keep the Moslems away from this national organisation. The Congress of 1888 was to be held at Allahabad and in the United Provinces, of which Allahabad was the capital. Sir Syed Ahmad was the acknowledged leader of the Moslem intelligentsia of U.P. Under his leadership a powerful movement soon organised itself in opposition to the Congress. In justice to Sir Syed Ahmad it must be said that he was not a fawning flatterer or a self-seeker, who wanted to advance his personal interests by currying favour with British officialdom. He was no more an Anglophil than any of the Hindu leaders of the new national movement. He saw however that should the power then exercised by the British in the administration of India get transferred to the educated Indians, whom the Congress represented, his co-religionists, the great Moslem community in the country, would inevitably be condemned to a status of political inferiority, for who knows how long! To join hands with the Congress and to try to secure the transfer of political authority from the British to the people of the country or, in other words, to the English-educated middle class would make not for real popular freedom but practically for the exploitation of the uneducated masses by the educated classes. As the Moslems were decidedly backward in modern education, compared to their Hindu brethren, the success of the Congress propaganda would mean Hindu ascendancy over the government and administration of the country. These were the considerations that evidently led the astute Sir Syed to advise his co-religionists to keep themselves away from the Congress, concentrating all their strength and energy in organising means for educating themselves with a view to challenge, upon intellectual and moral grounds, the superiority of the Hindu middle class. This was how when Mr. Hume and the leaders were carrying on the work of the Congress, Sir Syed Ahmad started a rival organisation of the Moslems under the name of the Mahomedan Educational Conference.

This Moslem movement took definite shape and gathered considerable strength in course of the year 1888. It was feared that Moslem opposition to the Congress might succeed in breaking it up. This fear was increased by the antagonism, inspired, as it was believed then by Sir Auckland Colvin and other high officials, and of a section of the Hindu aristocracy of the province headed by Raja Siva Prasad of Benares. It was even rumoured that Sir Syed Ahmad's people and Raja Siva Prasad's might break up the Congress by rushing it. Sir Syed Ahmad however kept himself aloof, but Raja Siva Prasad attended the Congress and read out a speech. He had made himself so unpopular with Congressmen by joining hands with Sir Syed Ahmad in trying to oppose, discredit and, if possible, strangle this infant institution, pregnant with the glorious promise of India's political future and freedom, that it was feared that the presence of Raja Siva Prasad in the Congress *pandal* might provoke serious unpleasantness. But the Congress leaders were fully alive to the delicacy of the situation and the supreme necessity of proving to the world the absolutely peaceful character of their agitation. So they gave to Raja Siva Prasad a patient, if not really a respectful hearing. When Raja Siva Prasad entered the *pandal* there were some hissings from the back benches which were almost immediately suppressed by the leaders. He had brought a speech written out for him. He went up to the platform, read it without any serious interruption, and having finished what he had to say he rapidly made his exit like an actor on the stage. The vast audience allowed him to pass out in peace.

Owing to the opposition of the Moslems under Sir Syed Ahmad and the veiled antagonism of the British officials and the British Press in India who tried to make it out that it was a movement of sedition and race animosity, the leaders of the Congress in 1888 invited a prominent European merchant to the presidential chair of the Allahabad Congress. He was Mr Andrew Yule, the head of the house of David Yule & Co. of Calcutta.

In the Hume-Colvin controversy I took some little part writing to the press practically supporting Sir Auckland Colvin in his warning against drawing the masses to this political movement. I

held that it would be a dangerous thing not only for the British Government, but also for India, if the masses were to be imbued with antagonism to British rule through our political agitation. Mr. W.C. Bonnerjee had declared in course of a public utterance that one of the objects of the Congress was to "lower the British Government in the estimation of the people." I found it impossible to accept, much less to support, this view of the aims of the Congress. Mr. Bonnerjee's training had been widely different from mine. Like all England-returned Bengalees of his generation Mr. Bonnerjee not only affected the European dress but followed in other matters also the ways of our British masters, repudiating the Hindu system of caste and eating and drinking like English gentlemen. He had, however, never passed through the ethical disciplines of the Brahmo Samaj and had never been called upon to pay the price of allegiance to the ideals of social reform such as the Brahmo Samaj had to pay. The principle of complete religious freedom inculcated by the British Government in India secured to the Brahmo Samaj this right, and the general body of the Brahmos therefore were grateful to Providence for the establishment of the new political power in the country, which was regarded by them, in those days, as a great moral influence. This was really the psychology of the Brahmo leader, Keshub Chunder Sen, when he proclaimed "loyalty to the Government" as one of the fundamental articles of the creed of his new church. Though not openly subscribing to it or incorporating it as an article of their religious faith, the general body of the Brahmos of those days were frankly afraid of a return of Hindu or Moslem rule in India. This was why I joined in the protest raised by Sir Auckland Colvin against the kind of mass political propaganda that had been started by the Congress in 1887. The Congress leaders in those days had little or no sensing of the danger of exciting the masses against the existing British rule. On the eve of the Congress at Allahabad I was prompted to sound this note of warning and therefore organised an address to be delivered at the Kayastha Pathshala Hall with Babu Kali Charan Bannerjee in the chair. Kali Charan was a leader of the Bengalee Christian community, and though he freely lent his services to our political

movements, he always approached every question that he was called upon to discuss not from the vulgar political view-point of pure expediency but from the highest ethical and spiritual standpoint. He was certainly not an Anglophil, but neither was he moved in his political activities by the least little suspicion of anti-British feeling. He was proud of his race and country and felt hurt by the cruel actualities of the position of the Indian Christian community which was dependent on British and other foreign Christian missions for their economic life and sustenance. He wanted to establish an Indian Church which would be free from foreign domination. But though a man of sturdy independence, Kali Charan honestly believed that in the existing conditions of his country a return to Hindu or Moslem rule would be disastrous to the moral and spiritual future of his people. In this I and my Brahmo friends in the Congress were at one with him. The announcement of this lecture by me with Kali Charan Bannerjee in the chair seriously disturbed the dovescotes of Congress leadership and some of the leaders went so far as to visit the camps of the delegates from the provinces asking them not to attend my lecture, as I would make a violent attack on Mr. Hume, following up my letter to the press supporting Sir Auckland Colvin as against the 'father of the Congress'. Notwithstanding all this however the Kayastha Pathsala Hall was crowded by Congressmen from all the provinces. Those who had come to hear a violent attack on Mr. Hume were agreeably disappointed because I did not refer at all to him or to his controversy with Sir Auckland Colvin. But so far as I remember I went to the fundamental question whether India could reasonably expect to build up a real modern democracy by enlisting the masses to the service of the Congress before they were sufficiently advanced in social ideas and had been properly educated. The continuance of British authority was necessary for building up a real freedom movement in the country with a view to establishing a government which would be government of the people, by the people and for the people.

The condition of the tea garden labour in Assam had been agitating us for some time past. Pandit Ramkumar Vidyaratna, a

missionary of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, had come to know at first hand in course of his missionary tour in the tea districts the tyrannies which tea garden coolies in Assam were subjected to. The Indian Association and the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj were in those days in intimate alliance. The report of Pandit Ramkumar Vidyaratna on the condition of tea garden labourers in Assam was placed before the Indian Association who took the matter up in right earnest. It deputed Babu Dwarkanath Ganguly for local investigation. Dwarkanath brought a hideous tale of the oppression to which tea garden labourers were subjected in the Brahmaputra Valley. Tea garden labour was regulated by two Acts of the Government of India. One was Act XIII of 1859. This Act made the breach of contract by a labourer liable to criminal action and penalty. Bad enough as this Act was, in 1881 another Act was passed by the Governor-General's Council which was condemned by so moderate an Indian publicist and politician as Kristo Das Pal, then editor of the *Hindu Patriot*, as "a veritable Slave Act". Under the provisions of this Act, tea garden labourers in Assam, working under a contract might be arrested without any magisterial warrant by the managers of their gardens if upon desertion they were found within five miles of their gardens. In practice tea garden managers acted as if they were the absolute masters of the body and soul of their labourers. The poor 'coolies' were frequently whipped by their masters; they were confined by order of their masters. Babu Dwarkanath Ganguly who was deputed by the Indian Association to investigate the truth of this report actually found regular dungeons in many gardens where the labourers were confined. There was practically no regulation of the hours of their work. Their wages, fixed by the Act, were frequently cut down on the plea that they did not turn out the full measure of the work allotted to them. We had read of the inhumanities of the American planters perpetrated on the helpless Negro slaves. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was a favourite book in those days with the educated intelligentsia of Bengal. This book, commended by Christian reviewers as standing next to the Bible, was translated into Bengali by Babu Chandi Charan Sen. We readily compared the condition of tea garden labourers in Assam

to that of Negro labour in America before the Emancipation. Bengal felt keenly on this subject of tea garden labour in Assam. Sylhet, my native district, has been a tea district from the early days of this industry. In my boyhood and early youth I had come across starving and sick coolies from the tea gardens. All these early experiences came up to my mind when Pandit Ramkumar Vidyaratna published his *Cooly-Kahini*. At the Madras Congress of 1887, if I remember aright, the Bengal delegates wanted to have a resolution passed by the Congress against the legalised inhumanities of the Assam Cooly Act and the practical tyrannies to which the helpless 'cooly' population was subjected in Assam by their British masters. But it was ruled out of order on the ground that it was a provincial-subject and could not therefore be legitimately discussed by an all-India gathering. Some of the Bengal delegates, felt keenly on this subject, as stated already, and at Allahabad they pressed it upon the attention of the Subjects Committee. And when it was defeated there I tried to bring this matter up by moving an amendment to one of the resolutions of the Subjects Committee dovetailing this 'cooly' question to it. I was permitted to move my amendment, but the president paid me a backhanded compliment by commending my cleverness, but ruling my amendment out of order.

Chapter 7

SWAMI DAYANANDA AND THE ARYA SAMAJ



It was after my return from the Madras Congress that the developments in the *Tribune* which led to the severance of my connection with that paper took place. But though I gave up my connection with the *Tribune*, I saw no reason to immediately return to Calcutta. And I continued to live at Lahore, throwing myself, with all the energy and enthusiasm that I had, into the numerous public activities of the place, particularly in connection with the Brahmo Samaj. The Brahmo Samaj in the Punjab exercised a great influence over the rising generation of English-educated Punjabees at one time, though, of course, there were not many members of it who cut themselves off from the orthodox Hindu society on account of their fidelity to the ideals of the Samaj. Pandit Nabin Chandra Roy exercised a great influence in his time over the new generation of educated Punjabees. He was, I think, the founder of the Brahmo Samaj in Lahore. By temperament and training he was more like the leaders, or more correctly, the leader of the Adi Brahmo Samaj in Calcutta. While he had profound regard for Keshub Chunder Sen, he was not in any sense of the term a militant religious and social reformer such as Keshub had been in the early part of his life. He was a Sanskritist of repute, and well posted in Islamic culture. For these qualifications he was selected to be the registrar of the Oriental University at Lahore when it was first organised. The inspiration of this university came very largely from a body of Punjab officials, who recognised the danger to British rule which the universities like Calcutta offered. They wanted to protect the rising generation

of the Punjabees from the influences of modern European thought and culture that had found an efficient instrument in the system of education promoted by the Calcutta University. All the colleges in Upper India, including those in Lahore, had been affiliated to the Calcutta University. The Calcutta University was dominated inevitably by Bengal. The Punjab officials did not like the spirit of freedom and self-assertion bred in the new generation of Bengalees brought up under the influence of the Calcutta University. This new spirit in the educated intelligentsia among the subject populations of the country naturally provoked irritation and open resentment in the ruling classes. This was the psychology really of that reactionary educational policy which found its most open and organised expression in the new Oriental University at Lahore. The professed object of this university was to give preference to Oriental studies and the promotion of ancient Hindu and Islamic cultures over Occidental studies and the pursuit of modern Western culture. The motive was openly political. The officials did not want a second Bengal in the Punjab, and they thought that they would be able to stem the tide of modern ideas by encouraging mediaeval Sanskrit and Arabic learning. Sir Lepel Griffin and Dr. Leitner were the leading spirits in this new movement in the Punjab and northern India.

Dr. Leitner and Sir Lepel had both left the Punjab when I went there, the former having retired to England, where he continued the work for a revival of Islamic culture and was mainly instrumental in building a mosque at Woking, in the suburbs of London, and the latter had found congenial employment as political agent in North-West India and Rajputana. The Oriental University, while still retaining its faculties of Oriental learning, had not been able however to keep out modern European culture. English literature, European history and modern science and mathematics were important branches of study in the Oriental University in the later eighties of the last century, when I first went to Lahore, and through these studies the modern spirit was powerfully at work among the youthful intellectuals of the Punjab as it was in the rest of India.

The Brahmo Samaj had found in these materials a very helpful basis for its propaganda. But the rationalism produced by studies in the university was somewhat of a different type which the same studies had produced in the early days of English education in Bengal. In Bengal the movement which it called into being was a movement of pure rationalism. The logic of the teachings in the university and the schools worked unhampered by any prepossessions. The youthful intelligentsia followed or tried to follow the logic of their rationalism unreservedly wherever it led them. Some therefore became sceptics and what they called themselves free-thinkers. They repudiated all authority except that of their own reason and conscience. They denied all outside revelations and built their convictions about God, the Soul and other religious conceptions exclusively upon their individual reason. Some therefore did not believe in the Unseen; others, who did cherish some sort of faith in the Unseen, based their conviction upon the teachings of Sir William Hamilton, Reid and Flemming, whose works were included in the textbooks of the Calcutta University. The dominant philosophical or theological thought in Bengal among the intellectuals was intimately allied to that of the Intuitionist School. The Brahmo Samaj, particularly after its revival under Devendra Nath Tagore, based all its philosophy and theology upon the original intuitions of the human kind. Keshub Chunder Sen also followed Devendra Nath in basing all his theological teachings upon the same doctrine of intuitions.

When I came to Calcutta and joined the Presidency College in 1875 Keshub was in the zenith of his intellectual and moral influence over his educated fellow countrymen not only in Bengal but more or less in the other Indian provinces also. But a reaction had already commenced to flow, very feebly as yet, against the universalism of Keshub's teachings. It originated really within the Brahmo Samaj itself, in that section of the Samaj called the Adi Samaj, which was under the leadership of Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore. In his earlier propaganda Devendra Nath had accepted the authority of the Vedas as Divine revelation. He believed that these inculcated the worship of Brahman only.

Gradually however doubts arose in his mind. Neither he himself nor his associates in the Brahmo Samaj movement had regularly studied these sacred books. The rationalistic influence in the Brahmo Samaj of those days came very largely through Babu Akshay Kumar Datta, who was a diligent student of the physical group of the sciences of his day. These studies drove him not certainly to a denial of the existence of God but to a kind of agnosticism. The logic of the doctrine of intuition had not as yet fully revealed itself to the consciousness of the intellectual leaders of the new religious movement. Raja Ram Mohan Roy's position in regard to scriptural authority was little known and less understood by the leaders of the Brahmo Samaj of that time. The immediate followers of the Raja had been drawn from the orthodox Hindu fold. Most of them were attracted to the Raja's movement by his powerful and fascinating personality more than by any reasoned convictions of their own. When the Raja went to England many of his followers abandoned all active association with the Brahmo Samaj. Ram Chandra Vidyavageesh was about the only associate of the Raja in the movement who remained loyal to it even after the Raja's death, trying to carry on the weekly ministrations of the prayer hall of the Brahmo Samaj, in accordance with the terms of its Trust Deed. Ram Chandra Vidyavageesh was however an orthodox Brahmin of the Tantric school. The Raja himself belonged to the same school; his interpretation of the Hindu *Shastras* was not only based upon the teachings of the old *Upanishads* and the Vedanta but also of the more modern *Tantras*, particularly the *Mahanirvana Tantra*. In his personal devotions the Raja regularly used the Hymn to Brahman of this *Tantra*. Hariharananda Swami was believed to be the Raja's spiritual guide in this matter. Ram Chandra Vidyavageesh was also a disciple of Hariharananda. Though a believer in the Vedantic doctrine of Brahman or the Ultimate Reality, neither Hariharananda nor Ram Chandra seems to ever have been troubled by doubts regarding the authority of the Vedas. Raja Ram Mohan had worked up a rational position for himself in regard to scriptural authority. He had reconciled the doctrine of intuition with the authority of the accepted scriptures of the

different world religions. These found in the Raja's philosophy objective verifications of the subjective intuitions of the human mind. They were both revelations of Divine Authority as also intuitions of the human mind each corroborating and correcting the other. The ultimate test of truth was neither the one nor the other but the unity of both. This was really the Raja's position. He had therefore based his teachings to the Hindus upon the Hindu scriptures as much as we find him basing his teachings to the Christians in his *Three Appeals to the Christian Public* upon the Bible. The Raja however claimed, like Martin Luther, the right of private judgment in interpreting the scriptures, thus finding a way to reconcile individual reason with scriptural authority, or the intuitions of the mind with the experience of the race. But the Raja's associates and followers in the Brahmo Samaj were little exercised over these philosophical and theological speculations. Most of them accepted the authority of the Vedas without question. The Raja himself had raised his protest against the popular ceremonialism of the Hindus on the authority of the Vedas which was universally accepted by his people in those days. The Brahmo Samaj in seeking to revive the cult of Brahman of the *Upanishads* and the *Vedanta* with a view to reform current Hinduism had appealed not only to the intuitions of the human mind but equally, if not more explicitly, to the authority of the Vedas which it accepted without question or criticism. This was the position of the Brahmo Samaj when Devendra Nath joined it. Doubts regarding *Vedic* infallibility were however raised by the rationalistic influences in the Samaj that came with the new intellectual and moral forces let loose upon society by the Hindu College and the teachings, particularly of De Rozio, who had strongly imbibed the spirit and teachings of the French Encyclopaedists of the 18th century, the intellectual authors of the French revolution. The disciples of De Rozio were practically all sceptics or agnostics. They did not believe in any manner of supernatural revelation or authority.

It was in this atmosphere of free thought that the Raja's movement was revived by Devendra Nath. Naturally therefore Devendra Nath found himself face to face with the question of

Vedic infallibility as almost a problem of life and death with the new religious movement which he represented. He had to solve it. It was however no longer a question of opinion but of fact. The question of opinion had already been settled by the teachings of the Raja, who had established the truth of the cult of Brahman of the *Upanishads*. The *Upanishads* themselves had based the knowledge of Brahman upon the testimony of human reason and human consciousness. That was already the accepted and well-established article of the Brahmo creed, which admitted of no doubt and called for no re-examination. The only question was whether the authority of the *Vedas* could be maintained, and this question could only be settled by a thorough examination of the *Vedas* themselves to find out whether they inculcated only the worship of Brahman or also of the numerous gods of the popular Hindu pantheon. Maharshi Devendra Nath had sent four Brahmins to Benares, the chief seat of Vedic learning, to examine this issue, and when they came back with the verdict that the *Vedas* not only inculcated the worship of Brahman through meditation and spiritual realisation, but also enjoined the worship of the Vedic gods, the Brahmo Samaj publicly abandoned its old position in regard to Vedic authority and discarded the old name of the new religion as *Vedanta-Pratipadya Brahmo-Dharma* or the religion of Brahman established by the *Vedanta*, and commenced to describe it as simple *Brahma-Dharma* or religion of the Brahman. But though the Brahmo Samaj thus cut itself off completely from its old moorings in our national scriptures it did not under Maharshi Devendra Nath take up an openly universalistic, much less a denational position. Maharshi Devendra Nath compiled, or more correctly speaking, inculcated a new scripture for the Brahmos. In this book the principles of the Brahmo Samaj were formulated through the texts of the *Upanishads*, not compiled as a sacred anthology, but as what came spontaneously to the Brahmo leader when he sat down to dictate the principles of the Samaj revealed in his own illumined consciousness. Though repudiating the authority of the *Vedas*, the Brahmo Samaj under Maharshi Devendra Nath did not completely and practically divorce itself from our national

scriptures. In fact, Devendra Nath believed and claimed that his Brahma-Dharma was as much a direct and original revelation as the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* themselves. Devendra Nath was sincerely proud of the culture of his people. He and those associated with him in the leadership of the Brahmo Samaj in those days, with the exception of Akshay Kumar Datta, who was, as I have already said, the most consistent rationalist among them all, believed the religion which they preached and practised to be the purest form of Hinduism. Rajnarain Bose, early in the seventies of the last century, in a remarkable address, proclaimed the superiority of Hinduism (by which he meant the religion of Brahman and not certainly the ceremonialism and symbolism of his people) over all the great world religions.

Rajnarain Bose, his leader Devendra Nath Tagore and the wing of the Brahmo Samaj movement which they represented were thus the fathers of the present nationalist movement in India. This movement could not, however, divest itself of the spirit of Raja Ram Mohan Roy who had worked out a rational synthesis between national religions and that universal religion of which these national religions were different expressions, some rendering certain phase or phases, others certain other phase or phases of this universal religion, which was implicit in every particular religion but completely explicit in none. Therefore, neither Rajnarain nor Devendra Nath nor any other leader of the Adi Brahmo Samaj claimed any exclusive revelation for their cult and culture. This was done by Swami Dayananda Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj.

Dayananda came to Calcutta early in the seventies of the last century proclaiming a new monotheism as the real religion of the *Vedas*, and on the strength of this assumption he tried to establish the doctrine of Vedic infallibility similar to the doctrine of infallibility, according to popular notions, among Christians and Moslems of the *Bible* and the *Quoran*. But the Brahmo Samaj had already anticipated the movement of Dayananda in Bengal. English education had dissipated the idea of the scriptural infallibility or supernatural revelation among our intellectual classes. The issue which Pandit Dayananda raised was not

therefore at all a live issue in Bengal. Dayananda is said to have met some of the leading Pandits of Calcutta, but failed to actively interest them in his mission. The need of a re-examination, re-explanation and re-interpretation of the traditional religion of the people created by their contact with modern European thought and culture and the conflict between Hinduism and the aggressive evangelical Christian missions had been already very largely met by the Brahmo Samaj. Besides this, even among the orthodox sections of the Hindu community in Bengal Swami Dayananda's contention that the Vedas inculcated the worship of not many gods and goddesses but only of the Supreme Lord or *Iswara*, evoked little or no interest because the mass of our people believed in the multiplicity of gods and goddesses, who were worshipped by popular Hinduism not certainly as the Supreme God or *Iswara* but as His instruments or agents. The religion of the Hindus among us could therefore never be characterised or condemned as polytheism. Even Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who had entered such a strong protest against the worship of these gods and goddesses never acceded to the popular Christian view that these worships made the religion of the Hindu polytheistic any more than the popular faith in the Christian Trinity or belief in angels or *firista's* in both Christianity and Islam made these two world-religions polytheistic. This also took away very largely from the strength, importance and interest of the mission of Pandit Dayananda so far as the Bengalee intelligentsia or the Hindu populace of this province were concerned. This is the reason why Swami Dayananda's message found little or no response from the Bengalee Hindu community.

A second reason was perhaps this, namely, that the new generation of educated Bengalees was fairly acquainted with Sanskrit literature and the Vedic exegesis of Pandit Dayananda failed therefore to make the impression on them which it subsequently did upon the Panjabee mind that was less familiar with Sanskrit. Dayananda's law of interpretation was very simple, and like all simple explanations of complex problems it did not satisfy the more critical Bengalee mind. Dayananda's law of interpretation was that the meaning of every word must be

ascertained by its context. A familiar example of it, as cited by him, was: if a man dressed for a ride asked for *Saindhava*, he must have meant by it a horse and not salt which was also another meaning of the word. The word *agni* in Sanskrit is derived from the root *anja*, which means both to walk and to know; *Agni* therefore may mean both Him who is all-knowing as well as that which continuously moves. This last is the characteristic of fire, which, when lighted, at once moves through the fuel or the thing which is on fire, while the first meaning of *anja* can only be applied when *agni* means that which knows or the All-knowing. Therefore, when we find *agni* addressed as the Deity in the *Vedas*, this *agni* cannot be the god *Agni*, but must necessarily be the Supreme Being. These were familiar examples of the law of Vedic interpretation enunciated by Pandit Dayananda.

The fact of the matter is that the new generation of Hindus in the Punjab felt a keen humiliation in their inability to meet the attacks of Moslem and Christian propagandists, who condemned their religion as idolatry and polytheism. In the message of Pandit Dayananda they discovered first, a powerful defensive weapon by which they could repudiate the claims to superiority of Christianity and Islam over their national religion. Dayananda, in the second place, did not only find a weapon of defence to the Punjabee Hindu in his *Satyarth-Prakash*, he made a violent attack on Christian and Moslem propaganda showing up the unreason of both these alien systems and exposing what he believed to be their moral lapses also. All this helped to feed the pride of race of the Punjabee Hindu, who had previously found himself in a completely helpless position under the attacks of Christian and Moslem propaganda.

It did not take me long, when I came in personal contact with the Arya Samaj movement in Lahore, to find out all these things. The movement, at least in those days, seemed to me, in fact, far more political than religious or spiritual. The militant spirit of it was opposed to the spirit and ideals of piety of the Brahmo Samaj in which I had been brought up from the days of my early youth. Neither did it appeal to me as a real freedom movement such as that of the Brahmo Samaj in those days, and,

in fact, had been from its very birth. It had been a movement of religious and social revolt, absolutely uncompromising in its attack upon whatever seemed to make for intellectual or social bondage in current rituals and institutions of the Hindu society. But with its dogma of Vedic infallibility the Arya Samaj seemed to me to be more anxious to make a compromise with current Hinduism, not in its so-called idolatrous aspect, but in any case in its ancient faiths and worships as formulated in its highest scriptures, the *Vedas*.

Every Hindu, whether he believed or not in the gods or goddesses of the popular Hindu pantheon, accepted the authority of the *Vedas* as the ultimate sanction of his faith. By accepting Vedic authority Swami Dayananda worked to keep himself and his movement within the Hindu fold. This was not the first time either that Hindu religious reformers had tried to reconcile their reforms with the parent organisation or organism by keeping them within the jurisdiction, so to say, of the *Vedas*. Even the followers of the Sankhya school, which had discarded belief in *Iswara* or the Lord as not established or proved, accepted the authority of the *Vedas*. The school of the rationalist Jaimini, who did not accept the truth and reality of the Vedic gods Indra and others, did not repudiate the authority of the *Vedas* and the truth and utility of Vedic sacrifices. The Vedic texts were magic *mantrams*; the performance of prescribed rituals with the recitations of these texts produced the promised results through the power inherent in these *mantrams*. These *mantrams* or texts are not composed by men but have been revealed simultaneously with creation. Therefore these Vedic *mantrams*, or, in other words, the whole of the *Vedas*, are co-eternal with creation; they are not only not composed by any human but not even by God himself, who is as much controlled by the magic power of these *mantrams* as the rest of the creation. This, briefly, was the position of what may be called the ritualistic schools of ancient Vedic exegesis. There were other schools also, namely, the physical school, which interpreted the various Vedic deities as natural powers. A second school that might be called the metaphysical school interpreted these various Vedic deities and the hymns or *mantrams* addressed

to them as symbolic of the relation between the mind and the senses over which it presides in the human organism. The third school of ancient Vedic interpreters was the historic school. They believed that many, if not all, of the Vedic deities had originally been human beings who, by the acquisition of special merits attained godhood, and became deities with powers of control over the creation. These, briefly, were the many schools of Vedic interpretations found in the earliest Vedic lexicon, the *Niruktas*. Unfortunately however the generation to which we belonged, and particularly those to whom Pandit Dayananda delivered his message of Vedic theism or monotheism, had not even a nodding acquaintance with the ancient exegetical literature of the *Vedas*. Of course, it is hardly reasonable to assume that Pandit Dayananda himself had no knowledge of the *Mimamsakas* or the old *Niruktakaras*, the authors of Vedic lexicon. But it can be justly surmised that he saw that the old exegetical methods of interpretation and the somewhat scholastic lines of reasoning upon which they were based were not likely to be acceptable to the modern educated Indian mind. What the educated Indian, who was more familiar with current Christian or Moslem propaganda, wanted was exactly such an exegesis as Pandit Dayananda offered, simultaneously establishing the claims of Hinduism to a pure form of monotheistic worship, and setting up a scriptural authority for the *Vedas* which chronologically were much older than both the Christian *Bible* and the Moslem *Quoran*. This really was the secret of the success of the Arya Samaj movement in the Punjab, where as early as the eighties of the last century a keen conflict had already started between Hinduism on the one side and Christianity and Islam on the other.

Dayananda with the natural instinct of a reformer, however, clearly realised it that unless Hinduism was purged of many of its prevailing faiths and practices it had no chance of holding its position as a religion for the modern man, whether in India or in the larger world of our time. His was therefore not merely a movement of religious reform but of social reform also. As in his programme of religious or theological reconstruction of current

Hinduism he took his stand upon the authority of the *Vedas* as the highest scriptural sanction, so also in the matter of social reform he went to the same source and wanted to revive the Vedic scheme of social economy, repudiating thereby most of the current social evils of Hindu society. He thus repudiated the prevailing system of caste. Every human, as Manu says, is born Sudra; no one therefore is born Brahmin. The Brahmin, as well as other twice-born castes, are vested with the special qualities of their castes by the Vedic sacraments or *samskaras* and the special training to which they are subjected after receiving these sacraments. It is therefore not birth that confers the dignity and sanctity of Brahminhood upon a man but really the purification and uplift of his physical, mental, moral and spiritual nature resulting from the special disciplines, through which after receiving the sacrament he has to pass. According to Dayananda's interpretation of the social economy of the *Vedas*, all men are born equal, though in the lowest rung of the evolution of their common manhood, and have to rise higher and in the scale of that manhood by purificatory disciplines. This was the original social scheme of the *Vedas*. In this scheme called by the general name of *Varnashrama* there was nothing that militated against the modern ideal of fundamental equality or brotherhood of man. All men are equal in their origin and at their birth. Differences and inequalities arise later on through difference in their mental and moral acquirements and the various social functions which they are called upon to discharge. Dayananda's scheme of Hindu social reform was therefore based, like his scheme of Hindu religious reform, upon the authority of the universally accepted Hindu scriptures, namely the *Vedas*, and in this way, without breaking away from the ancient moorings of our religious and social economy, Swami Dayananda sought to reconstruct Hindu thought and life with a view to bring these into line with the advanced religious and social thought of our time.

Dayananda had passed over to the other side before I went to Lahore and came into direct contact with his movement. He had left three principal books embodying his teachings, (1) *Satyarth-Prakash*, (2) *Veda-Bhashya Bhumika*, and (3) an

unfinished commentary of the *Rig Veda*. The first was in Hindi meant for the instruction of the general Hindu populations, who were not acquainted with Sanskrit. The last was written in Sanskrit to make it of the same class as the ancient Vedic commentaries. His position regarding Vedic authority underwent important changes in the course of its evolution. At first he had claimed this authority for all the *Vedas*, including the *Brahmanas* and the *Upanishads*. When, however, his opponents pointed it out that the *Upanishads* themselves repudiated the authority of the *Vedas* as the highest or the only revelation, proclaiming that knowledge was divided into two classes, one inferior (*apara*), i.e. not the supreme or the highest knowledge, and the other superior (*para*) or the highest or supreme knowledge, and that the *Rig Veda* and the other *Vedas* with the *Upanishads* were inferior knowledge or *apara vidya*, while that by which the Imperishable or Brahman is known constituted the one only supreme knowledge or *para vidya*, Dayananda gave up his earlier position and declared that the *Upanishads* could not claim authority as real revelation. Neither did the *Brahmanas* fall within that category. The *Samhita* portion of the *Vedas* and particularly the *Rig-Veda-Samhita* in the existing recension of the ancient *Veda* is alone real Vedic revelation. So he started a commentary of the *Rig Veda*. If I remember aright he was able to write out the commentary only of the first four chapters of the *Rig Veda* before he was called away from the scene of his earthly labours. It is difficult to say whether he could consistently, even with his own canon, interpret the whole of the *Rig Veda* to support his contention that it inculcated the worship of one Supreme Being only and not of many gods and goddesses.

It seems somewhat surprising that Dayananda did not follow the ancient canons of Vedic interpretation to establish his position in regard to Vedic monotheism. The ancient seers held more or less the same position and had established certain canons of scriptural interpretation with the help of which Swami Dayananda could have more easily, and nontheless rationally and at the same time without breaking away from our ancient tradition, fully establish his position. There are two principal canons of

Vedic interpretation in our old exegetical literature. One is *Adrishtatmakam Shastram* or scripture that deals only with the unseen. The necessary corollary drawn from this is that whatever is cognisable by the senses or can be derived from direct sense knowledge through the laws of deductive or inductive logic is not *shastra* or scripture, and cannot claim the authority of divine revelation. If the scripture mentions these objects they are to be judged by the ordinary canons of logic or the principles of science. There is no superfluity in God's creation. He has endowed us with our outer senses and the *manas* or the inner sense that coordinates outer sense impressions, and thus enables us to know all outer objects; for this it is not necessary that we should have the help of divine revelation. The second canon was *Moksha-pratipadakam Shastram* or that alone is scripture or revelation which establishes the nature of *moksha* or salvation and the means of attaining it. This canon had to be appended to the first canon because there are many things in the *Vedas* which fall within the unseen. There are magic and incantation and many other statements in the *Vedas* that are not cognisable by the senses and that cannot be tested by ordinary logic or reason. Shall we accept them as true? Must this acceptance be regarded as binding on us? No, declares the ancient *Mimamsakas*, because these magics and incantations or reference to supernatural objects or phenomena have nothing to do with *moksha* or salvation. This *moksha* or salvation can be attained through knowing Brahman alone. Therefore, *moksha pratipadakam* means only that in the scripture which teaches about Brahman or the One only Supreme Being. By these ancient canons all texts referring to gods and goddesses are put outside real Vedic revelation. One need not spend himself therefore in explaining away texts that speak of Vedic gods and goddesses in the desire to establish the thesis that the *Vedas* inculcate monotheism only. By the application of these ancient canons Swami Dayananda might have established the truth of Vedic monotheism, at the same time completely silencing his orthodox Hindu opponents. But the revival of these ancient canons would however make little or no appeal to the mass of the modern educated mind in India,

brought up under the influence of current European rationalism. It wanted a direct message of monotheism on the authority of the *Vedas*, because such a message would place the modern Hindu religion on the same plane as Christianity or Islam, and it was this more perhaps than any spiritual need that moved the youthful intelligentsia of the Punjab in those days. The Brahmo Samaj by its universalism, and particularly by its open appreciation of Christian ethics and piety, did not meet this need of the Punjabee mind. This was why the message of the movement of Pandit Dayananda Saraswati had such large, if not almost universal, acceptance by the intellectual classes of the Punjabee Hindu.

My lectures in the Brahmo Samaj drew crowded houses, but it was not the attraction of the Brahmo message that brought all these people. It was really the intellectual and moral polemical elements of these that attracted young Punjabees of the Arya Samaj, who looked upon my lectures as samples of controversial disquisitions. Nor indeed did I make any attempt to win these young men by sympathising with their narrow patriotic aspirations nor filiating the teachings of Dayananda Swami to ancient Vedic exegeses. In fact, I had then myself not come into contact with the exegetical literature of the *Vedas*. Therefore, though I gained some public position as a speaker and writer, my Brahmo propaganda was not much of a success in Lahore.

The Arya Samaj was still, if not exactly in its infancy in those days, in its early youth and had the gushing enthusiasm of youth and the youthful militant spirit. The message of the soul had not as yet reached it. It had not as yet even caught the moral enthusiasm of social reform. Swami Dayananda had no doubt propounded a scheme of social reform that aroused considerable opposition from the orthodox Hindu community, but the fight was still confined more to the intellectual plane than on the practical. No serious attempt was as yet made to reconstruct even the domestic and social life of the members of the Arya Samaj on the line of Swami Dayananda's teachings. Caste exclusiveness, based not upon merit but upon the accident of birth, still obtained among most members of the Samaj. The social war in Bengal declared by the Brahmo Samaj was infinitely

keener, and the sacrifices which the acceptance of the Brahmo creed involved were not so evident in those early days in the Arya Samaj. But all the same the Arya Samaj was slowly organising a new Hindu society on the lines of Swami Dayananda's teachings. It was really many years after that the moral and the spiritual aspects of the movement commenced to manifest themselves. They came out most prominently in the course of an internal conflict in the Samaj between two wings of it, nicknamed the *Ghas* (grass) party and the *Mash* (meat) party, or the vegetarians and the meat-eaters. The vegetarian wing was certainly more loyal to the teachings of Swami Dayananda than their rivals, the non-vegetarians; and the logic of their position drove them to carry out the other injunctions of Dayananda also. Early marriage was gradually abandoned. I cannot say how far inter-marriages were encouraged or tolerated, though caste exclusiveness was openly given up in the matter of eating and drinking. There was, however, one item of Dayananda's teachings which, so far as I am aware, had never been tried to be carried out. Dayananda was opposed to widow-remarriage as advocated by the modern Hindu social reformers. But he wanted to revive as a substitute for it the obsolete Vedic system of *niyoga*, by which a man might raise issues on a widow without marrying her in the regular Vedic way.

Both morally and spiritually the Arya Samaj has advanced very considerably from what I found it in the late eighties of the last century. I had a nodding acquaintance at that time with Lala Munshi Ram, who became subsequently the leader of the vegetarian wing of the Samaj and who upon attaining the fiftieth year of his life renounced the status of a householder and devoted himself exclusively to the pursuit of the higher spiritual life. After this he entered the last order in the *Varnashrama* scheme of the Vedic social economy which Swami Dayananda wanted to revive in our time, the order, namely, of the *Sannyasi*, taking the name of *Sraddhananda*.

The most important work of the Arya Samaj has been education. The Dayananda Anglo-Vedic College had already started when I was in Lahore. Since then this educational

movement has very considerably developed, covering practically the whole of the Punjab and a good portion of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh with a network of schools and colleges managed by the Samaj.

From those early days upto the present, two forces have been at work in the Arya Samaj. The chief inspiration came from its intense patriotism. This patriotism has always carried with it a spirit of intolerance of, if not virulent antagonism to, other religious systems, particularly the Moslem. Its attitude towards Christianity has not been less hostile, though certainly not so open as it has been towards Islam.

The politics of the Arya Samaj stands divided into two sections; one 'moderate' and the other 'extremist'. The moderation here is due not so much to any statesmanlike view of India's current political problems as to the recollection of the way in which the Kooka movement among the Sikhs in the Punjab was ruthlessly suppressed by British authority. These characteristics had already commenced to appear even when I was at Lahore. But though the moderates and the extremists have differed in their expressions of political ideas and patriotic sentiments, at heart I had found even in the late eighties, anti-foreign sentiments in the youthful adherents of the Arya Samaj far more bitter than what we had in Bengal. The young Arya Samajists openly declared that they were waiting for the day when they would settle their account both with the Moslems and the Britishers.

Chapter 8

THE CONGRESS OF 1889



In 1889 the fifth Indian National Congress was invited to Bombay. The fourth Congress at Allahabad, as I have already noted, received very considerable attention owing to the opposition of the Moslems, led by Sir Syed Ahmad, not really to its fundamental demands except so far as they implied an immediate transfer of a large portion of the power exercised by the British to representatives of the people of India, which meant the educated middle class composed practically of Hindus. The Moslem opposition to the Congress continued and showed no signs of abatement. Congressmen regarded it as an evil, but it was an evil which they found they must put up with for how long they did not know. The closing months of 1888 found a new sensation in Indian political circles in what was described at the time as Lord Dufferin's parting kick to Indian politicians. His Excellency was the principal guest at the St. Andrews Day Dinner in Calcutta on 30th November, 1888. Lord Dufferin took advantage of this opportunity to deal a violent blow at our new national political institution, still so to say, in its swaddling clothes, holding up to ridicule the demand for self-government put up by the educated Indians. Those who knew of the secret hand that Lord Dufferin had in encouraging Mr Hume to organise the Congress were taken by surprise at what seemed to them to be His Excellency's absolutely unprovoked and savage attack on his own hand-maid. It was believed that whatever others might say or do the viceroy at least would preserve an attitude, if not of open sympathy with, at least of benevolent neutrality towards a movement that, if it did nothing more, found a safe outlet for the new and growing political ideals and aspirations of the educated classes. Lord Dufferin's parting speech therefore took their breath away. He

brought all his powers of oratory and cultivated sarcasm to take the wind of this new political movement by pricking the bubble of what he would say its stupendous self-conceit. India was not fit for any measure of real self-government. For yet a long long time her affairs must be managed by her British masters. In asking for the introduction of representative government in the country the Congress was wanting to "ride in the chariot of the sun" and "make a long jump into the unknown," and so on and so forth, periods after periods, he brought out what he evidently thought to be an absolutely crushing artillery of vitriolic sarcasm and satire and discharged it on the heads of the Congress. This attack contributed not a little to bring an unprecedented crowd to the Congress at Allahabad during Christmas, 1888. But at the close of that session of the Congress which was really a very great success as a popular demonstration, the leaders of the Congress sat down to seriously consider the situation. Lord Dufferin's speech, they knew, would do little or no harm in India. But what about England? How would the British public take that powerful attack on the new political movement of educated Indians by one of their foremost statesmen? And with a view to counteract whatever evil effect Lord Dufferin's speech might produce upon British politicians they decided to invite one of their prominent parliamentarians to preside over the next Congress to see for himself two things, first, whether the Congress was really a disloyal movement carrying within it the seed of future physical revolt against British rule and, next, whether the educated Indians, who were represented in the Congress, were not as fit to run representative institutions as the general body of British electors. These were the two fundamental issues which the opponents of the Indian Congress, both official and non-official, had prominently raised during the year 1888-89. And with a view to dissipate these two notions they decided to invite Mr Charles Bradlaugh to the presidential chair of the next Congress in Bombay.

Mr Bradlaugh had already been drawn into sympathy with the Congress propaganda. He had succeeded to the title of 'Member for India' that had one time been held by John Bright. Without openly identifying himself with the Congress propaganda

Mr. Bradlaugh had been trying to press the general aims and objects of the Indian National Congress upon the attention of the British Parliament. So, naturally enough, the Congress leaders in India wanted that he should be asked to come out to India during Christmas 1889, and preside over that year's session of the Congress. But Mr. Bradlaugh refused to accept that invitation because, as he said, he would be able to serve the cause of India better as an independent sympathiser than as the official representative of the Congress. Sir William Wedderburn, who had been a member of the Bombay Administration and on his retirement from the Indian Civil Service had entered Parliament and had been taking an active interest in the work of the Indian National Congress in England, was therefore approached as the next best choice. He accepted the offer and came to preside over the Bombay Congress of 1889. Mr Bradlaugh was also induced to come as a visitor, which he agreed to do; he had already pushed himself to the front rank of British Liberal politicians. He had fought his way to Parliament. He was a noted free-thinker who was not attached to any of the religious denominations of England. People called him an atheist because he refused to subscribe to the accepted ideas regarding God and religion. He carried on a vigorous propaganda in support of his religious and social opinions through the Press and the platform. He had a weekly sheet called *The Social Reformer* which, I think, had a good circulation among the rising generation of British workmen who had already commenced to nurse a growing grievance against the old aristocracy of land and the new aristocracy of industry and commerce who, they believed, were really responsible for their social degradation and economic dependence. The church was in alliance with these higher classes of society. God himself favoured them. He had no compassion for the grinding poverty of the working classes. This was the mentality of an increasing number of British workers. Bradlaugh's *The Social Reformer* naturally made a powerful appeal to these people. When the church and religious respectability tried to persecute this man for his free thought, no less than for his frank advocacy of the cause of the starving poor of his people, the

latter quite naturally commenced to gather themselves round him.

In his early days Mr Bradlaugh could hardly get a patient hearing from British audiences. An anecdote which I came across of his early fights for freedom of thought and speech has remained deeply engraved on my memory throughout these long years. It was this: Mr Bradlaugh had advertised a public meeting. The house was packed by adherents of religious and social respectability in the locality who had gone to the meeting determined to allow him no hearing. As soon as Mr Bradlaugh got up to the platform these people commenced to create a hideous noise by booing and catcalling. Mr Bradlaugh, without trying to quiet them by word of mouth, calmly stood before the table and taking out a couple of oranges from his pocket commenced to leisurely peel them and started eating the pieces one by one. This took the audience somewhat by surprise, and tired of waiting to drown the speech of a man who was not speaking and waiting to raise their yells when he would start to speak, the audience stopped howling. Mr. Bradlaugh at this said: "Ladies and gentlemen, why do you stop? Go on until I finish my orange." And this brought the whole house down with laughter. The humour of the man at once captivated his audience. Bradlaugh also in the same leisurely way continued to eat his oranges and after finishing them he commenced his address which he was able to deliver in pindrop silence. This was the man who had fought the prejudices of his people by his heroic persistence and his sweet reasonableness until, without compromising his principles or opinions, he became the idol of the poorer classes of his country and a universally respected member of their national Parliament from which the government had tried to keep him out on the plea of his heresy. Members of Parliament have to take the oath of allegiance to the Crown and the Constitution after their return by their constituencies, and before taking their seats and exercising their right as legislators. This oath of allegiance called upon God to witness the vow. Mr Bradlaugh, faithful to his religious opinion, refused to take this oath unless the appeal to God was deleted from it. He was not therefore allowed to sit in

the House. He was disqualified from doing it on account of his religious opinion. Denied admission into the House he went back to his constituency at the next bye-election due to his inability to enter the House, and his constituency once again returned him. Once again Mr. Bradlaugh, coming to the Bar of the House claiming his right to enter it as a legally returned member by taking his oath of allegiance to the Crown and the Constitution but without any appeal to God in whom he did not believe, was again refused admission. This game went on for some time until public opinion not only in his own constituency but more or less in all the constituencies of the British Parliament was roused to a sense of the tyranny of the thing by which men were deprived of their civic rights on account of their religious opinion, and a new Act of Parliament altered the form of the oath of allegiance to accommodate men like Charles Bradlaugh. This moral fight had raised Mr. Bradlaugh very high in the estimation of the whole world and loud was the cheering from all sides of the House when after the passing of the new Act, Bradlaugh entered and standing at the Bar of the House took the new inoffensive oath of allegiance. From the very first day Bradlaugh became a general favourite in the House. He was a very powerful speaker and more than that, an unostentatious man, though a very determined fighter.

He came to attend the Congress of 1889 and his name and fame brought many delegates and many more visitors from all parts of the country to this Congress. I think, he addressed the public session of the Congress, but a short speech which he delivered to the Subjects Committee made the profoundest impression upon me. In course of this speech Mr Bradlaugh, in the deep voice characteristic of him, having assured us of his help in England in support of the demands of the Congress, said: "But, gentlemen, you know what little man can do." Every fibre of his being seemed to throb at each of these words. They were the summing up of the life's experience of one of the most strenuous workers for the good of brother man of his generation. Some of us were sitting on the edge of the platform behind the Chairman and our distinguished guest. As Bradlaugh sat down

after that little speech I pushed Mr G. Subramanyam Iyer, editor of the *Hindu*, Madras, who was seated next to me and said: "Mr Iyer, who said that this Bradlaugh is an atheist?"

Mr Bradlaugh's presence at the Congress of 1889 had roused great hopes in our mind. When a man of his powers and position agreed to help us in the British Parliament we naturally felt that the fulfilment of our aspirations must be fully assured. But Providence willed it otherwise. Mr Charles Bradlaugh, before the next year was out, was removed from the scene of his earthly labours.

Chapter 9

THROUGH THE SHADOW OF DEATH



The years 1888 and 1889 had been slowly working an almost silent change in my inner life. When I joined the Brahmo Samaj and broke away from my father, I had hardly any religion. The Brahmo Samaj itself had not then built up a theology of its own. Devendranath built his faith in God on the philosophy of the Intuitionist School, which was the sheet anchor of theistic theologians in Christendom in those days. His spiritual life was nourished by the transcendental emotionalism of the Persian poets Saadi, Hafej and others. His theism was therefore more Islamic than Hindu. Strictly speaking, the Hindu part of it, derived from the *Upanishads* and the *Vedanta*, was decidedly more pantheistic than theistic, though Devendranath never accepted the pantheistic view of Brahman of the *Upanishads* and the *Vedanta*. Devendranath's Brahman was a Personal God, very much like Jehova of the Jews, Allah of the Moslems and 'our Father who art in Heaven' of the Christians. I was drawn into the Brahmo Samaj, however, not by its theology or philosophy but only by its message of personal and social freedom. In fact, I had never troubled myself over theological questions, I no more enquired into the nature of the God of the Brahmo Samaj than I had done into the nature of the numerous gods of the Hindu pantheon. Yet I prayed to these Hindu gods and goddesses in my utter helplessness in the face of the illness of those whom I loved. The same sense of helplessness drove me to pray to the God of the Brahmo Samaj. This God, no less than the Hindu gods and goddesses of the religion of my boyhood and early youth, was what St. Paul called an Unknown God.

The first direct realisation of God as a Power-not-myself that guides and shapes my life came to me after my return from Lahore in the early months of 1889. At this time looking back upon my life I found that I wanted to live my life in a particular way but circumstances absolutely beyond my control pushed me in another way. I had gone to Lahore to save the little patrimony that I had through living on my income from the *Tribune*, Rs 150 a month, which was quite sufficient for my small family, wife and three children. Living was much cheaper in those days than it is now. I hired a small bungalow for Rs. 20 a month with a compound and outhouses. I had a helper whom I had taken from Calcutta with me. He was cook and general worker in the family combined and I paid him Rs. 8 only a month and food. The fear of thieves, which was natural owing to the isolated situation of my bungalow, as well as the need of a *punkha*-puller led me to engage a tall and sturdy Moslem Jat as *chowkidar* whom I paid Rs. 7 a month, and a sweeper at a small sum, who came twice to the house. This was all the establishment I had. Food cost very little compared to present time. Meat—good mutton—sold then four annas a seer in Lahore; fish cost, if I remember aright, a little less; fine rice could be had for Rs. 5 a maund, and flour also at about the same price; good ghee cost 12 as a seer and pure mustard oil about 8 as a seer; vegetables and fruits even did not cost much; milk from cows brought into our compound was paid at the rate of 8 to 10 seers a rupee. So until I resigned from the *Tribune* the sum of Rs. 150 a month that I had as my wages was sufficient for my expenses and I had not to draw upon my little capital during these months. When however I gave up my place on the *Tribune*, I had to requisition for my expenses from Calcutta. Owing to my inexperience I had spent a large sum in going to Lahore with my family. When I decided to continue to live in Lahore as an independent gentleman I had to cut a fairly big hole in my patrimony. Thus, though I had gone to Lahore to save what little I had as my inheritance from my father, I found on my return to Calcutta that I was poorer by more than Rs. 3,000 for my Lahore trip. Looking back upon it all I discovered that I could not shape my life as I

wanted to do, but circumstances beyond my control compelled me to quite a different way. This was the beginning of a new evolution in my religious life and thought.

My speculations about God in early youth made me a dualist. In my search for the Ultimate Reality or what the popular theologies of those days called a First Cause I arrived at the simple solution that this First Cause was not one but two, God and Matter. I could not understand how God, who is Spirit, produced Matter or how Matter could produce Spirit. The riddle of the universe composed of Matter and Life and Spirit could only be solved therefore by positing both Spirit and Matter as the combined First Cause. God and Matter were therefore both equally eternal and infinite, both coexistent. God handled and shaped matter to produce this universe just as the potter handles and shapes clay to make his pots and pans. Unconsciously however this dualism gradually slipped off like the slough of a snake. It happened in the closing months of 1888 and the beginning of 1889. There was no God but God, and whatever happened in man and in His world happened by the ordering of this one Universal Providence. This was really the beginning of a new spiritual awakening in me.

I did not know it then. But a great personal calamity that befell me in the early weeks of 1890 was ordained to deepen and confirm me in my monistic philosophy of life. In the closing months of 1889 my wife was in a very delicate state of health expecting to be confined within a few weeks. Her previous confinement had been a narrow save from what is called in medical parlance 'flooding'. I was therefore extremely nervous as the time of her confinement arrived and had taken every possible precaution to provide against any accident. For quite a month previous I had, without the knowledge of my wife, kept a quantity of ice to meet any untoward contingency. I had asked my friend Dr. Sundari Mohan Das, specialist in midwifery, to let me have a list of medicines that might be required to prevent 'flooding'. A trained midwife was engaged and when the time came both Dr. Das and Dr. Nilratan Sircar were present. There was no 'flooding'; it was prevented by careful treatment of the

patient. On the 19th of December, 1889, a little daughter was born, and the mother and child were both doing so well that five days after, at the pressing request of my wife who knew that I had been looking forward to be present at the annual session of the Congress in Bombay, I left them in charge of her medical attendant. They were doing splendidly when I returned from Bombay on the 2nd or 3rd January, 1890. Three weeks later, during the anniversary of the Brahmo Samaj, my wife went to the prayer hall which was just opposite our residence in 13, Cornwallis Street. After the morning service word came to me that my wife had fallen down in a swoon and had been taken home. I immediately went with my friend Dr. Sundari Mohan Das, who was living in the same house with us occupying the ground floor, while we lived on the first floor. He examined her and declared that she had received no injury. Her swoon must have been due to her natural weakness after childbirth. On the 15th of February I was invited to address a meeting of the Students' Weekly Service of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. I took as my subject the problem of evil and eloquently pleaded that in God's world there was no evil: there could be none. What we, in our ignorance, called evil was only good in the making. I did not know then that within less than three days, to be accurate, before three nights had passed, God would challenge my deep optimism by taking away my wife without warning. On the night of the Monday following she passed away, and the first news that even the inmates of the house where we lived had of her illness was when she had passed away.

It was a terrible blow. What had I not done to keep her in life! I lived in Calcutta because here we could have the best medical help available in India, but no time was given me to call in any medical help except that of my friend Dr. Das. On Sunday evening she had an attack of fever, the temperature rising to 105°. The next morning it came down to 102°; in the evening it was below 101°. Dr. Das while going to bed at half-past nine came and examined her and in the full assurance that the fever would leave by midnight left a quinine mixture. Between 10 and 11 she became suddenly very restless and her restlessness woke

me up. I stretched my hand to pacify her and found that the tips of her fingers were icy cold and she was unconscious. Immediately I went down to Dr. Das and as we came up we heard her stertorous breathing. Dr. Das called for a pair of scissors to cut her hair short with a view to make the application of ice more effective. As he was doing it I opened her eye lips and found her pupils completely dilated. I saw that her end had come and she had already passed beyond medical help. In a minute or two her breathing ceased. I told Dr. Das, what was the use of more help, she had passed away. Dr. Das, to dull the blow to me, said: "Nonsense, her pulse is beating." I went and took up her wrist. In a few seconds the pulse also ceased to beat!

It was a terrible blow. But He Who dealt it knew also how to uphold its poor victim. The immediate effect of it was to strengthen my growing monistic faith. My inveterate optimism that always led me to see the bright side of everything also came to my relief. Since my return to Calcutta from Lahore I had been living on my small capital. It was almost exhausted when this blow fell upon me, and my first thought was one of thankfulness to God for having taken her away before the coming financial crash. She was young, twenty-eight, when she passed away. She was in the full bloom of her health and beauty, and I thanked God that she had not to face disease and the infirmities of age. All these fancies came as a great consolation to me. The blow after all was not so terrible as in my imagination I had always felt it would be.

For nine years she had been my companion in life. All our material and moral shortcomings notwithstanding, our married life was looked upon by our friends and acquaintances as almost an ideal life. My wife could not be called educated in the modern sense of the word; she had never been to school. She was not illiterate but her knowledge of Bengali never went beyond the three Rs. But there was a native refinement in her character which no school education could give. It was her inheritance from her parents and family; and this refinement drew to her all those who came in contact with her. At Bangalore, in Calcutta, at my own native place in Sylhet and at Lahore, she won the love and

respect of all our friends and acquaintances. But still, looking back upon the terrible calamity that overtook me more than forty years ago, I feel sincerely grateful to the Lord for it, because through her death came, by and by, the message of a new life and a new illumination to me.

I had bought a copy of Emerson's *Essays* a little more than a year before she passed away, and I had tried to read these many a time during this period, but could not read through even a single essay. I found no appeal in them. One day in the darkness of my bereavement I took the book up again almost idly. As I opened it my eyes fell upon the essay on Compensation. The very first lines compelled my attention—"The compensations of calamity are as sure." The inborn optimism of my nature at once responded enthusiastically to this new gospel. For a year from this time forward, Emerson became my constant companion. Tennyson's *In Memoriam* was also another book that possessed me at this time, but Emerson more than Tennyson. The monistic philosophy of life and God into which I had been slowly finding my way before my wife's death received now, through the teachings of Emerson and Tennyson, a new strength and corroboration. I gradually became a confirmed monist. All things were from God. Whatever happened to man's life was by the will and ordering of God Himself. Evil and Good were both equally instruments of God for the fulfilment of His purposes among men. This was the new evolution in my theology and ethics which was brought about by my wife's death and by my studies of Emerson mainly and, to some extent, of Tennyson also. This was the compensation of the great calamity that overtook me in the early months of 1890.

Dr. Karuna Kumar Sen was a leading medical practitioner of Calcutta in those days. He was a remarkable personality. He had very great promise and might have easily made a roaring practice, particularly as he was recognised as a specialist in heart and lung diseases. But he was a very conscientious man and would not take up more than three or four cases at a time. He once told me that four cases were the limit which he could properly attend to. He carried the thought of his patients with him

throughout the time they were under his treatment. He was not a member of the Brahmo Samaj but he brought up his only daughter as the most advanced members of the Brahmo Samaj did. He had her educated in the Bethune School and College. Dr. Karuna Kumar was not merely a medical man; he was a great lover of poetry and *belles lettres* also. Shakespeare was his most favourite poet and he himself taught Shakespeare to his daughter. Karuna Kumar was a cousin of Babu Durga Mohan Das, and I made his acquaintance in Durga Mohan Babu's house. He knew my wife also. After her death he happened to meet Pandit Shivanath Shastri in the streets and calling him to his carriage he said: "Shastri, what had poor Bipin done that your God should have taken his wife so cruelly?" And with this tears flowed from his eyes. He was not a believer in God, but all the same he was a good man, simple as a child. I had however found a soul-satisfying answer to the question he put to Pandit Shivanath Shastri in my new and growing faith in the Universal Providence, very considerably strengthened by the teachings of Emerson.

After the death of my wife Babu Durga Mohan Das one day told me that Harriet Martineau had written in her autobiography that "my father so deeply loved my mother that within three months of my mother's death he married again." The truth of it came to me as a personal experience in the solitude of my bereavement. I commenced to pine for the companionship from which I had been deprived. I felt myself like a creeper whose familiar support had been suddenly taken away. Within a year and a half I married again.

Chapter 10

THE CONSENT BILL AGITATION (1890-92)



My wife passed away in February 1890. In August following I secured the post of Librarian and Secretary of the Calcutta Public Library, popularly known as the Metcalfe Hall. This library had been recently reorganised. It was the oldest, if not the only, public library in Calcutta since the early days of the British administration. It had been built by public subscription and located in the building which had also been raised by public subscription as a memorial to Sir Charles Metcalfe, known as the liberator of the Press in British India. In its early days it was patronised by the British colony in this city. The new generation of educated Indians also took advantage of it to continue their pursuit of learning after they had left their school or college. Keshub Chunder Sen and Protap Chandra Majumdar, among others, stored their mind with literary and philosophical knowledge in this library. It was a common meeting place of British and Indian lovers of learning of those days. Babu Pyari Chand Mitra was, I think, the first librarian of the Metcalfe Hall. His cousin Gopi Krishna Mitra succeeded him. Gradually however this one-time flourishing institution fell into decay. It had been carried on by subscribers, both European and Indian. Besides there were a number of original donors who enjoyed all the privileges of subscribers without paying any monthly subscription. Almost every leading family in Calcutta had acquired the rights of proprietorship over the library though they could not sell it and divide the price among themselves. Those who had first subscribed to the funds of the library had, many of them, a genuine interest in the advancement of learning. But their

descendants, who inherited their rights as proprietors of the library had, with few exceptions, lost any interest in it. Among European donors many of them had left the country, while the generation of British officials and European merchants who followed them had not much interest in an institution that had been so necessary for their predecessors, but the need of which could be now more easily met in other ways. The Metcalfe Hall therefore inevitably fell into decay. There was no money to buy new books. The receipts from subscriptions also fell, until it was becoming increasingly difficult to meet the current expenses of the institution. At this time the government made a non-recurring grant and the Calcutta Municipality offered to make an annual contribution provided the management of the library was placed in the hands of a committee partly elected by the Municipality and partly by the proprietors and the subscribers. It was a committee of twelve. On the reorganisation of the library this committee, wanted a new librarian and secretary. After Babu Gopi Krishna Mitra had retired from this post, a retired Anglo-Indian who had been, I think, the headmaster of some school, was appointed in his place. He was an old gentleman. The committee wanted to introduce new blood and a younger man to direct the management of the institution. They advertised for applications; I applied. There were one hundred and nineteen applicants, and I was appointed.

Mr Lee, the Chairman of the Calcutta Municipality and a member of the I.C.S., was the president of this committee. Mr Beveridge, at that time the district judge of Alipore, was a member of it. Raja Narendra Krishna Dev of Sovabazar was another member. Dr. Mahendra Lal Sarkar and Maulavi Seraj-ul-Islam were two among the six nominees from the Calcutta Municipality. Babu Mahendra Nath Bose, a retired subordinate judge, was one of the representatives of the original proprietors. Babu Amarendra Nath Chatterjee, a High Court pleader, was another representative of the original donors. The post carried with it a salary of Rs. 100 rising by annual increment of Rs. 10 to Rs. 200. But the real attraction of this post had never been the salary attached to it, though, I think, it had been higher in its

held its session in the rooms of the British Indian Association. Raja Pyari Mohan's father Babu Joy Krishna Mookherjee had been a leading light of the British Indian Association and the Bengal zemindars. He was known among us, the younger generation of Calcutta students, as the "Fawcett of Bengal". Raja Pyari Mohan had taken the highest degree of the Calcutta University and was an M.A., B.L., a rare distinction in those days among the scions of the landed aristocracy of our province. He was a perfect gentleman, free from all suspicion of pride of his position as a premier Bengal landlord and a distinguished graduate of the Calcutta University. The meeting hall was packed almost to suffocation when I arrived. If the president had not also arrived just at the same time it would have been perhaps impossible for me to enter the hall. But seeing me at the gate Raja Pyari Mohan accosted me with his characteristic suavity and I was allowed to enter the meeting with him. The meeting was divided into two hostile camps—one in support of the Bill and the other in opposition to it. When Raja Pyari Mohan got up to deliver his presidential address there was a tremendous uproar evidently created by the supporters of the Bill, and it seemed as if the meeting could not go on. In the midst of this uproar I stepped forward and cried: "Gentlemen!" This immediately silenced the uproar. The supporters of the Bill had invited me to this meeting and when I stood up naturally they quieted down. I made an appeal to give a respectful hearing to the president, who was not only the son of a distinguished father, a representative of the landed aristocracy of Bengal, but was one of the finest flowers of our university, and above all a perfect gentleman. We should be stultifying ourselves if we did not give Raja Pyari Mohan a patient and respectful hearing. This short speech of mine was received with loud cheers by both friends and enemies. Raja Pyari Mohan had no more trouble with his audience until at the close of his presidential address he was prompted to declare that it was a meeting of those who opposed the Consent Bill: those who were in favour of it had no place here. There were two notices convening this meeting—one an anonymous Bengali handbill, the other an advertisement in the *Statesman*. While the Bengali

handbill declared that the meeting was convened to oppose the Bill, the advertisement in the *Statesman* announced that it was convened to *consider* the Bill. I got up with a copy of the *Statesman* which was placed in my hands by a member of the audience and wanted to know which was the authorised notice, the Bengali handbill or the advertisement in the *Statesman* which must have been paid for and published on the authority of the conveners. At this, there was again an uproar, the opponents of the Bill wanting to shout me down and the supporters crying, 'go on, go on.' The president could not silence the meeting: neither would I sit down without having my say. The result was that by simply standing for four or five minutes I was instrumental in breaking the meeting up. Some sort of a meeting was held, I was told, subsequently and though Raja Pyari Mohan did not attend it, a resolution was passed condemning the Bill.

This incident led to certain developments showing the wild spirit that had been let loose by the opponents of the Bill. I commenced to receive anonymous letters threatening me with all sorts of chastisement even to the extent of taking my life. I did not take these seriously, but some months later a revolver was actually fired at me from a blind and dark lane opposite my residence in Cornwallis Street one Sunday evening as I sat under a hanging kerosene lamp reading. The shot broke the gas lamp-post on the street, possibly preventing the bullet coming to me. There was an uproar, but the man who had fired the shot could not be found; he must have escaped through one of the houses of ill-fame that stood on this blind lane from which the shot had been fired. I mention this simply to indicate the measure of excitement which the Consent Bill agitation had created among our youthful reactionaries. It was however an utterly ignorant propaganda. The institution of child-marriage was little known in the ancient records of the Hindu people. The Hindu epic *Mahabharata* had incontrovertible evidences of the custom of post-puberty marriage. The story of Savitri, the universally acclaimed model of Hindu chastity, proved not only this custom, but of consensual marriage also. Even in the statutes of Manu, it is stated, that a girl should wait for three years after pubescence,

and if within that period her parents or guardians did not find a suitable husband for her, she would be free to choose one herself. In the Hindu medical science sixteen has been mentioned as the minimum marriageable age for girls and twenty-five for young men if they desired healthy and strong progeny. The idea that a girl must be given in marriage before she attained puberty was of a comparatively recent and degenerate age. In the olden times this thing was unknown, and yet even learned leaders of the Hindu society raised this hue and cry against what they called an attempt to subvert their religion and destroy the sanctity of their home and the inner strength of the Hindu social economy that had stood so well the ravages of time.

The Bill was duly passed, though it was opposed even in the Council Chamber by some eminent Hindu members. But the passage of it did not bring the heavens down.

Chapter II

IN THE SERVICE OF THE BRAHMO SAMAJ



Ever since my college days I had been associated with the religious and social propaganda of the Brahmo Samaj. In the earlier days I drew my inspiration mainly, if not exclusively, from the works of William Elery Channing and Theodore Parker. After the passing away of my first wife I was led to literally drown myself in Emerson. My Brahmoism all this time was of the American Unitarian type, but Emerson introduced me to a new vision of God and religion. Emerson was a monist. He saw the hand of God in every event and incident of man's life. He had been a minister of the Unitarian Church, but latterly he not only gave up the ministry but even ceased to attend any church service. Asked by a friend why he did not go to church, not even a Unitarian church, he gave a characteristic reply. For one thing, he said, the preachers dealt with things that had no relation to the actualities of our life; they did not seem to know of our doubts and difficulties and always talked of ethereal things leaving aside the most intimate matters of our life. Another reason was that nobody spoke of his own God but of his brother's, brother's, brother's God. This anecdote of Emerson burnt itself deep into my soul. I felt convicted of the offence of which Emerson spoke here. Have I a God of my own, a God of my own realisation and not a God who has come down to me through ancient legends or at best modern preachings.

The experiences of my personal life had gradually led me from dualism to monism. The death of my wife confirmed me in my idea of the absolute unity of God. He was found to be both the efficient and the material cause of this universe. 'Matter', as

I remember to have written somewhere at this time, "is the Thought of God concretised; man is the Spirit of God incarnated." The bogey of pantheism prevented many devout Brahmos from pursuing the inexorable logic of the Brahmo doctrine. God is One. From Brahman have all objects come into being; by Brahman all objects continue to be; towards Brahman all objects move through processes of cosmic evolution; and into Brahman all objects ultimately enter. This is a fundamental creed of the Brahmo Samaj. The logic of it is the kind of monism which I found in Emerson. Emerson was really a confirmed monist. His essay on *Our Soul* proves it. Tennyson was also a monist as his higher pantheism proves. The mistake of popular pantheism comes from taking the part for the whole. In fact, even this conception of part and whole is not wholly correct because the whole is present not in part in its parts, but stands in all its wholeness in every atom of its parts though unmanifest, but moving towards manifestation. This is what Emerson meant when he said that the Infinite is as perfect in the atom as in the universe. The full truth of Emerson's monism came to me when from Emerson I went to the *Bhagavad Geeta* and the Vedanta. In these ancient Hindu scriptures I found a corroboration of my own feeling after God and Emerson's realisation of the Absolute. This was perhaps the greatest compensation that Providence found for me for the loss of a devoted wife and the breakup of a happy home.

I was not for long in the Calcutta Public Library. I read in the *Bible* that no man could serve two masters, but here as secretary and Librarian, I had not two but twelve masters, and some of them commenced to make a hell of my life by trying to exercise their brief authority over me individually. I knew that strictly speaking, the members of my committee had no right to direct me unless formally deputed for the purpose by the committee. But few of the esteemable gentlemen who constituted the council of the Public Library had any training in the principles of representative institutions. The result was that some of them thought that I was their personal servant and could be ordered about as they pleased. I was in charge of the work of the library. On the reorganisation of the library a public reading room was

started. Its doors used to be kept open from 8 in the morning to 9 in the evening. I had my assistants in charge of this reading room. I had to supervise their work also. I had therefore to pay surprise visits to the reading room before and after the usual hours of the lending department which were from 11 to 5. Naturally therefore my hours were sometimes irregular; some days I would come to the Library at 8 or 9; on other days therefore I did not attend from 11 to 5, coming some days at 12 and going at 9. But some of my masters could not appreciate the nature of my duty, and one of them one day coming to the library asked one of my assistants for the attendance register of the secretary and finding that sometimes I came as late as noon, he wrote caustic remarks on the register. I was so put out by this impertinence that I told one of my assistants to inform this gentleman that if he interfered with my work and wrote anything on my book I would have to be compelled to turn him out. If he had any complaint against me, the proper course was to report to the council and whatever disciplinary action might be called for could be taken by the council and not by individual members of it. The president alone could represent the council when it was not sitting and could direct me or **even** punish me, but individual members of the council or **committee** had no such right. This attitude of mine inevitably offended some of my masters and I found it necessary to give up this post.

But though some of the Indian members of my council irritated me, the President, Mr Lee, always treated me with great consideration and kindness. When therefore I resigned from the Calcutta Public Library Mr Lee took me up to fill a temporary vacancy as license inspector in the Calcutta Municipality. But I did not continue here also for long. My life-long passion for writing and preaching soon forced me to give up what people called all secular work and devote myself entirely to the mission work of the Brahmo Samaj as a lay preacher.

In January 1892, I had a strange experience that hastened my resignation from the Calcutta Municipality. On the 8th of January this year on the anniversary of the death of Keshub Chunder Sen I was moved to deliver an address in the hall of the

old City College in Mirzapore Street in honour of his memory. The hall was packed and even the stairs were crowded by those who could not make their way into the hall. The subject was a very delicate one. While the followers of Keshub in the Brahmo Samaj of India, particularly the missionaries of the New Dispensation, looked upon him as a man of God, the apostle of a New Dispensation, there were others, particularly among the members of that section of the Brahmo Samaj to which I belonged, who had very scant respect for him and regard for his message. Besides, it was his death anniversary. On an occasion like this I felt that nothing should be said that would hurt his friends or offend his enemies. I had read about Lord Dufferin that the only speech which he had written out before delivering it was when he was charged with moving in Parliament the resolution of condolence on the death of Prince Consort. This address of mine also was to be of the same nature in honour of the memory of the dead leader. So I wrote it out, but while writing it I was as if in a trance, so much so that my wife got frightened by the thought that I had been passing out of my mind. While writing it I did not refer to the works of the Brahmo minister. The lecture created a little sensation. The organ of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj noticed it in an article headed

‘A Much-needed Disclaimer’. My estimate of the dead Brahmo leader evidently offended the religious and ethical susceptibilities of the writer. On the other hand, it was enthusiastically applauded by the friends and disciples of Keshub. After I had delivered that address and it had been printed in the *Indian Mirror*, I commenced to read Keshub’s works to examine it if I had done justice to him. And what was my surprise to find that in many places of my address I had, without knowing it, quoted the very words of Keshub Chunder so much so that any unfriendly critic comparing my address with his own lectures might easily convict me of plagiarism. The experience was queer; it might even be called mystic; and I myself am sometimes tempted to believe that the Spirit of Keshub Chunder Sen dictated many portions of that address of mine.

I do not think I have any mystic element in my composition. I am, if anything, a stern rationalist. Yet I have had experiences that could hardly be explained by ordinary reason. These experiences helped to confirm my conviction that there was a Higher Power that constantly watched over us. This belief gave a practical turn to my life after I retired from my service in the Calcutta Municipality. I gave up from this time all idea of doing what was popularly called any secular work. In my philosophy of life there was, of course, no such thing as secular; everything was sacred. Secular or sacred depended not upon the works themselves but upon the motive informing them and the attitude of mind which one took to his work. The new attitude of my mind was that I must not henceforth labour for my wages. I would do that only for which God had fitted me best. I could undertake many works from the most menial to the higher intellectual and literary. I could do these with average efficiency, but of all the things that I could do, speaking and writing were the best. I would therefore dedicate my life henceforth exclusively to literary work, and public lecturing and preaching without any consideration of pecuniary profit, leaving my wages to God. Thus laying my earthly burden of the maintenance of myself and my family at the feet of the Lord, I took up the mission work of the Brahmo Samaj at this time. I was not an ordained missionary of the Samaj; I was not qualified for it. Neither did I hanker after, it. I was sufficiently known to the Brahmo congregations in the *muffasil* and though not an ordained missionary of the Samaj I soon found myself eagerly invited to various Samajs to help in the celebrations of their anniversaries.

In Calcutta I started about this time first a Bengali monthly called *Asha* or 'Hope' and subsequently a Bengali fortnightly under the name of *Kaumudi* which was also the name of Raja Ram Mohan's Bengali organ. These two papers were mainly directed to correct the abuses in the Brahmo Samaj itself. The democratic constitution of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj had been threatening to create an official Brahmo bureaucracy which seriously hindered the growth of freedom of thought in the community and real spiritual life among its members. The

government of the Samaj was vested in a general committee elected at the annual meeting of the Samaj and an executive committee of twelve elected by this general committee. It was really not a committee of elders as is found in many church organisations. Any one could get into these two committees provided he could carry favour with the general body of its members. Some of the elders of the Samaj including, among others, Ananda Mohan Bose and Sivanath Shastri, were not fully satisfied with the practical working of the constitution they had given it.

There was also a fatal stagnation which was visibly overtaking the thought-life of the Samaj. There had been practically no new movement of thought in the Samaj, after we separated from Keshub Chunder Sen and his missionary group. Keshub had advanced very considerably from the position which he held in the days of his early propaganda. The Sadharan Brahmo Samaj shared with him his theological conceptions of those days, but when Keshub gathered fresh spiritual and ethical experiences almost every day after we had parted from him, the general body of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj held fast to the thoughts, opinions and ideals of his earlier life. This also was another weak point in the life and movement of the Samaj.

In the next place, the Brahmo Samaj had been shunted off first, by Maharshi Devendra Nath himself, and next, by Keshub Chunder Sen from the position of Raja Ram Mohan Roy. The Raja's Brahmoism was a universal religion; it was not another new religion added to the existing religions of the world, but a rational synthesis of all these. The Brahmo Samaj however had been seeking to establish a *new religion* different from and purer than all other religions of the world. This certainly was not the idea of its founder. In a remarkable pamphlet published in both Bengali and English, under the caption 'Religious Instruction', the Raja declared that his religion was not different from the other religions. The worshippers in these religions worship by whatever name and through whatever forms and formularies it may be "Him only Who is the Author and Governor of the Universe" and the Raja also, though not using these forms and

formulas, worshipped the same Being. This was the fundamental position of the Raja. This was the foundation of the universal religion of the Raja. That the Brahmo Samaj was established by him on this foundation is clearly proved by the trust deed of the Samaj. But the Samaj had travelled far away from the Raja. In some respects it was a natural and inevitable evolution; in other respects it was retrogressive. All this called for a re-examination, re-interpretation and re-adjustment of the theology and disciplines of the Samaj. A small group of Brahmos felt the need of this re-examination and re-interpretation, and it is they who started the *Asha*. The *Asha* however during the few months it lived concentrated its attention, so far as I remember now, mainly upon the evils and limitations of the constitution of the Samaj. Referring to the executive committee of the Samaj, which had arrogated to itself not only the right of carrying on the secular work of the Samaj but even of controlling the thought and theology of its members as also of its recognised religious teachers, the *Asha* wrote a severely caustic sentence (adopting the dictum of Ruskin, that twelve fools do not make one wise man) that "twelve Ramas never made a Ram Mohan". The emphasis of the *Kaumudi* was on the Raja's universalism, though that universalism was not divorced from nationalism. Out of these agitators inside the Brahmo Samaj there gradually developed a strong note of nationalism, particularly in its theology, presenting the religion of the Samaj as not an abstract universalism but, as my friend Sitanath Tattvabhusan put it, "Hindu theism".

As I have said, after the death of my first wife I sought and found solace in the writings of Emerson. It was Emerson who first initiated me into that transcendental monism which I found more fully expounded in the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Geeta* and the *Vedanta Sutras*. After I retired from the service of the municipality I took up these studies. At one time I even started writing a Bengali commentary of the *Bhagavad Geeta*. It was not destined to be finished or even advanced far when circumstances, the details of which I do not remember now, compelled me to give up the attempt. But though I did not finish this commentary the attempt itself was of very great value to my

inner life. It gave me an insight into not only the theology of this scripture but even of its literary and dramatic setting. I was led to realise that the central theme of the *Geeta* was God and the soul. It starts really with the problem of the immortality of the soul or life after death, or more correctly speaking, the continuity of our personal existence after the dissolution of the physical body. I have never found anywhere such a bold statement of the immortality of the soul as I found in the *Bhagavad Geeta*. It starts with the startling assertion that before we approach the problem of the soul's life after death we must clearly understand it that the soul is not born in time and that which is not born cannot also die. All the literature of soul's immortality with which I had been acquainted never faced this question so boldly and with such irresistible logic. The Christian, or perhaps more correctly the Protestant Christian view, is based upon the assumption that the wrongs of this world would challenge the Divine Government of it as just and benevolent if we are forced to accept death to be the end of life with nothing hereafter. This argument never appealed to me. But here the Teacher of the *Geeta* never argues but takes the whole case out of the realm of deduction or induction into that of positive fact. That there is no death in the sense of annihilation of consciousness cannot be proved by logic; it can only be proved by actual experience. The *Geeta* says not as a matter of speculation, but as a matter of fact proved by direct spiritual realisation that "neither thou nor myself nor these lords of men were born (in time) nor is there any doubt that we all shall exist in the future." Things that come into existence in the time series all pass out of this existence inside that series. This body with all its sense-organs were not at one time. This is a matter of direct experience. It gradually came into being and therefore it must also pass out of being sometime. Whatever is born therefore dies. Birth and death are bound up together; the one must follow the other. We cannot resist this logic of fact. If the soul be immortal then the soul must have eternally existed, and therefore it cannot die or pass out of existence. This philosophy of the immortality of the soul at once captured me. What was a pleasant belief with me before it became a reasoned conviction of my life.

From the *Geeta* I was taken to the *Upanishads*. My friend Pandit Sitanath Tattvabhusan had about this time published the first part of his edition of the *Upanishads*. I had seen the five *Upanishads* published in their original with Bengali translation by Raja Ram Mohan Roy which had been recently reprinted by a Brahmo friend, Babu Kunja Behari Sen. But the Raja's edition had no Sanskrit annotation. He did not break up the Sanskrit texts into their components. Pandit Sitanath was therefore the first Bengalee to simplify the original texts of the *Upanishads*, publishing their grammatical analysis or *Anvaya* and made them still further clear by a Bengali rendering. Though therefore my knowledge of Sanskrit was of the most elementary kind, Sitanath Tattvabhusan's edition of the *Upanishads* helped me very materially to study these books. From these few *Upanishads* I was led to read the *Vedanta Sutras* with Samkara's commentary. Here my guide was the Bengali translation of it by Pandit Kalibar Vedantabageesh. I could not go through the whole book ; but the first few *Sutras* of it that I read opened up a new intellectual realm to me changing almost the very structure of my thought and mind and lending a new vigour to my Bengali and English writings.

It was about this time that a new chapter of my inner life was opened through the inspiration of my *guru*, Pandit Bijaykrishna Goswami.

Chapter 12

BIJAYKRISHNA GOSWAMI



Two men have in a special sense helped to make the religious and spiritual history of Hindu Bengal in the last century. One was Ramkrishna Paramhansa and the other Bijaykrishna Goswami. Ramkrishna Paramhansa is more widely known than Bijaykrishna Goswami. This wider, if not indeed, world-wide reputation of Paramhansa is due almost entirely to the missionary labour of Swami Vivekananda. What was St. Paul to Jesus Christ, that in some sense was Vivekananda to Ramkrishna. When Vivekananda burst upon public notice owing to the challenge which he threw out at the Chicago Parliament of Religions in the name of Hinduism, Ramkrishna Paramhansa was presented as a living example of the highest achievements of that Hindu faith and culture in the name of which Vivekananda had thrown out this challenge. Prof. Max Muller was induced to write a biography of this remarkable Hindu saint who proved the wonderful possibilities of Vedantic thought and culture to which European savants had been already introduced through the sacred books of the East, particularly Max Muller's own English translations of some of the ancient *Upanishads*. After the Chicago Parliament, Vivekananda leapt into all-India fame and with him Ramkrishna, his *guru*, also became an all-India personality. For these reasons Ramkrishna is far more widely known than Bijaykrishna. But though less widely known, Bijaykrishna's influence upon the evolution of the Hindu religious and spiritual life of Bengal in our time has not been less.

No history of the evolution of religious thought and life of Bengal can ignore however the work of the Brahmo Samaj, and the contributions of Raja Ram Mohun Roy, Maharshi Devendra

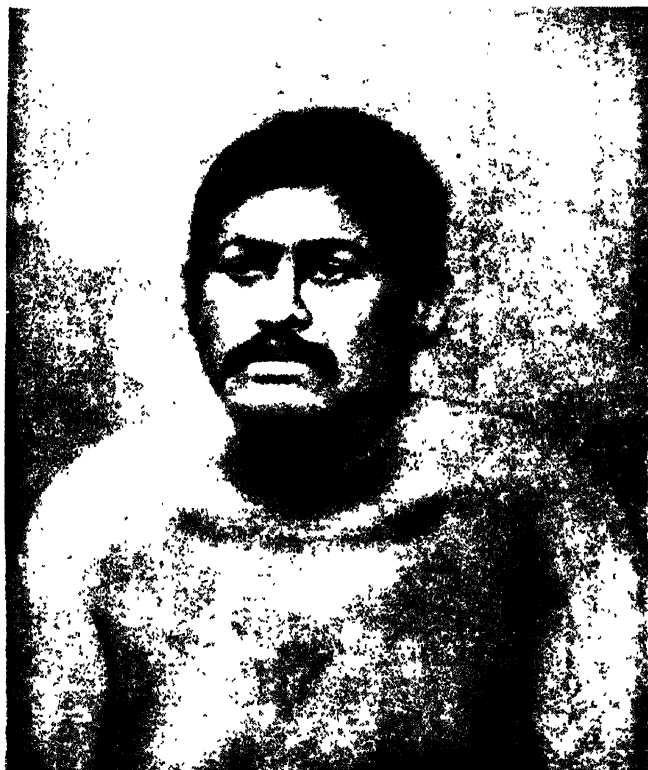
Nath Tagore and Brahmananda Keshub Chunder Sen. They were not Hindu revivalists, it is true, in the sense in which Paramhansa Ramkrishna may well be said to have been one and even Bijaykrishna Goswami may be claimed, in some sense and to some extent, to have been another. But at the same time, it must be admitted that Bengal owes her new national self-consciousness no less to these Brahmo thought leaders than to its more pronounced revivalists of later days. As for Ramkrishna Paramhansa it cannot be denied that it was Keshub Chunder Sen who literally unearthed him and brought him to the notice of our modern educated classes, of which Vivekananda himself was certainly one. The meeting of Ramkrishna with Keshub was an important event in our modern religious and spiritual history. There is universal mental alchemy operating in all human associations. Two men, particularly two such powerful personalities, both literally hungering and thirsting after realisation, could not possibly meet and know each other without immediately being mutually drawn by irresistible spiritual affection or attraction. And the close friendship that grew out of their mutual regard and love was bound to exert profound influence upon the inner life of both. Keshub influenced Paramhansa and drew him out of the groove of Hindu mediaevalism in which he had been brought up from his birth. And Ramkrishna also contributed a new freshness and reality to the spiritual endeavours of Keshub. Narrow bigotry or sectarian partisanship may try to belittle the mutual influence of these two highly gifted spiritual personalities of our time, but the judgment of history will never do it. Vivekananda himself, before he met Paramhansa Ramkrishna, had been a member of Keshub's congregation, and later on he came under the more openly rationalising influence of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj that had come into existence as a protest against Keshub Chunder Sen's new developments. Vivekananda's neo-Vedantism was built upon the fundamental teachings of the Brahmo Samaj. In view of all this, the history of the evolution of Hindu religious thought and life of Bengal during the last century cannot possibly ignore the Brahmo Samaj or the contributions that the Brahmo thought-leaders from Ram Mohun Roy onward made to it.

Paramhansa Ramkrishna himself could not escape these liberalising influences though he certainly brought to these his own contributions of direct God-vision and universal God-realisation.

Bijaykrishna had however been more directly and intimately associated with the Brahmo Samaj movement, and continued to the end of his days loyal to its fundamental principles and ideals. He did not repudiate these, but only transcended them in some respects and along certain important lines in his later life, and by so transcending the sectarian opinions and disciplines of the Brahmo Samaj, he achieved a very high place among the makers of neo-Vaishnavism.

The evolution of the religious and spiritual life of Bengal has been marked by two main streams or strains, one Shakta and the other Vaishnava. Ramkrishna represented the former and Bijaykrishna the latter strain of our age-long religious life and thought. The Shakti cult in Bengal is pre-eminently Vedantic. The theological background of it is the philosophy of Samkara, particularly the mediaeval interpretation of the Samkara system found in the *Panchadasee* school. The objective of the Shakti cult and culture in Bengal has been *Kaivalya* or that form of final salvation which comes through the complete merging of the human personality and individual consciousness in the Universal Self or Consciousness which is Brahman. This *Brahma-nirvana* or *Brahma-laya* is the goal of the religious disciplines and spiritual endeavours of the Shaktas of Bengal. Their philosophy is that of absolute monism. Brahman is the one and only Reality. And this Brahman is without any note or mark of self-differentiation in Him. Brahman is *Ekaras* and *Ekamevadvitiam*; *Brahma Satya Jaganmithya*—Brahman is the only Reality, the world is unreal. This is the basic text of the Bengal school of Shakta-worshippers. There is in reality no room for *bhakti* or the cultivation of the love of God in the scheme of this Vedantic culture. It admits *bhakti* only as a preparatory discipline. At the final realisation, there being no consciousness of duality, there can be no room for love and worship which implies duality. When the unity with Brahman is realised and the soul loses itself in Brahman, then

who will love or worship whom? In *mukti* or salvation there is neither love nor worship, but only the sense of supreme *anandam*. Even this *anandam* implies self-consciousness. But in *kaivalya mukti*, there is no consciousness of individual self. It is like dreamless sleep. What we call *anandam* even is not felt in that state. It is only when self-consciousness breaks out again that we know the *anandam* of that dreamless sleep or *samadhi*. Of course, there are various grades of this *samadhi*. In the lower grades of it consciousness is not completely lost; only consciousness of all outer phenomenal world is lost. And in this stage of *samadhi* the Hindu seer sees within him, in the light of his super-sensuous realisation, the many gods and goddesses of the popular Hindu pantheon, Kali, Durga and others. In the highest stage however all these visions disappear or merge in what may be called universal God-consciousness. The Bengalee Shakta-worshippers who attained this highest stage of realisation rose above all particularistic sectarian limitations. They realised their Kalee in every object of human worship. In mediaeval times, these advanced seers saw their special deity Kalee, for instance, in Krishna, the Vaishnavic deity also. This was the kind of universalism reached by Paramhansa Ramkrishna. In his direct spiritual realisation, Shyam or Shree Krishna and Shyama or Kalee, were one. These two were only two manifestations of the one and same Reality, Brahman. This had been a special note in the culture and realisations of Paramhansa Ramkrishna. But it was really no new experience among the higher reaches of the worshippers of Shakti in Bengal. We find this in earlier Shakta saints and seers also. It was, in fact, a very general realisation of mediaeval Hindu saints and seers. It was practically what may be called henotheistic experience. The especial object of worship of these superior devotees was almost identified in their deeper realisations with the objects of worship of other saints and seers. It showed the inborn intuition of Divine Unity of the Hindu mind. It also indicated the real standard of spiritual judgment of our people. Truth was established not on the beliefs or opinions of the carnal crowd, but on the testimony of the direct realisations of our saints and seers. So we find in the Shakti-worshippers of even mediaeval Bengal this universality of God-vision.



KALINATH DUTTA.

Father in Heaven'. Even Mahomed himself, when addressing the Lord as 'Akbar' the King of kings, followed really the same method, presenting the Almighty God or Allah in the terms of our common social or socio-political life and relations. But the tenderest experiences of parental love come through our relations with our mother far more than through our relations with our father, not to mention our experiences of the love of the king for his subjects. In our experiences, here in Bengal in any case, the son's relations with his mother are infinitely more tender, more intimate, freer and more confidential than his relations with his father. The son can take liberties with his mother in our society which he would not dare take with his father. The Shakti cult and culture of Bengal have therefore almost from time immemorial sought to realise *bhakti* or love of God, especially in terms of what may be called mother-love. And this brought our Shakti cult and culture into line with the cult and culture of Bengal Vaishnavism. On the emotional and spiritual side the superior saints and seers of both our Shakti and Vaishnava cults have therefore always had a close affinity which no one could suspect from the divergences and indeed the open and sometimes very distinct conflicts of their philosophical standpoints and their intellectual and sectarian attitudes towards each other. And it was this aspect of the realisations of Paramahansa Ramkrishna that made it so easy for Keshub and his friends to accept him into the intimacy of their spiritual life and endeavours.

But had Ramkrishna come into contact with Keshub Chunder a few years earlier than he did, the special type of his piety would probably have failed to impress the great Brahmo leader and this would have possibly altered the whole course of the religious and spiritual evolution of Hindu Bengal in our time very materially. The Brahmo Samaj in the earlier period of the ministrations of Keshub Chunder Sen was dominated by the spirit of European rationalism of the middle nineteenth century. Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore, under whose ministration the moribund movement of Raja Ram Mohun Roy received new life and vigour, cultivated the old Vedantic type of *bhakti* on the one side and was steeped on the other in the higher reaches of Islamic

bhakti. Even in his last days, the Maharshi used always to recite in moments of spiritual and emotional ecstasies not texts from the Upanishads which he so much loved but more often the sonorous stanzas from the Persian poets Saadi and Hafez, Devendra Nath, though as much a contemporary of Ramkrishna as was Keshub, never seems to have appreciated him as Keshub did. And the psychology of it was that after breaking away from the Maharshi, Keshub and his missionary group became fascinated by the type of *bhakti* peculiar to the Bengal school of Mahaprabhu, Sree Chaitanya. This *bhakti* movement in the Brahmo Samaj itself under Keshub Chunder Sen really prepared the ground for the appreciation of the unique experiences and spirituality of Ramkrishna as he came in contact with the great Brahmo leader. This fact must be borne in mind in any critical understanding of the influence which the Paramhansa exercised over Keshub Chunder Sen's later developments.

And this *bhakti* movement in the Brahmo Samaj was very profoundly influenced by Bijaykrishna Goswami. Raja Ram Mohun Roy and after him Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore have really been the original initiators of the neo-Vedantic movement in modern Bengal which had its latest and most powerful propagandist in Swami Vivekananda. Keshub Chunder Sen and Bijaykrishna Goswami have similarly been the inspirers of the new *bhakti* movement in Bengal which stands at the back of all that is true and good in the neo-Vaishnavic culture in Bengal. These fundamental facts must furnish the key to a correct and rational examination and understanding of the evolution of Hindu religious thought and spiritual culture in modern Bengal, that is, in the Bengal of our own time. And in this history Bijaykrishna has as high a place as Paramhansa Ramkrishna. And both of them really worked upon the foundations laid deep and wide by the Brahmo Samaj, from the days of Raja Ram Mohun Roy to those of Keshub Chunder Sen.

Bijaykrishna came of a long line of spiritual preceptors of the Bengalee Vaishnavas of Sree Chaitanya's school. Advaita-Acharya Prabhu, from whom the family of Bijaykrishna was descended, was a contemporary and colleague of Sree Chaitanya.

Indeed, tradition says that it was the heart-rending prayers of Advaita Acharya that brought about the advent of the *Avatara* of Nadia as Sree Chaitanya is generally styled. Advaita's heart bled at the degradation of piety and particularly of Vaishnavic *bhakti* that he saw about him. This, he believed, according to the teachings of the *Bhagavad Geeta*, could only be removed by a fresh advent or incarnation of the Lord Sree Krishna. So he made a vow to bring the Lord down on earth for the destruction of impiety and irreligion and the revival of piety and religion. Sree Chaitanya was born, according to this legend of the Bengal Vaishnavas, in response to this vow and the soul-compelling devotions of Advaita Acharya. Bijaykrishna traced his descent from him. The descendants of Advaita had been spiritual preceptors of large numbers of the followers of Sree Chaitanya's Vaishnavic school in Bengal. His father was a devout Vaishnava himself, as was also his uncle who was a great *Bhagavata* scholar. As *gurus* the family derived its earthly subsistence from the pious gifts of its disciples. Bijaykrishna, upon coming to age, took up his ancestral profession and commenced to go about among the disciples of his family scattered over the whole of north Bengal administering the Vaishnavic *mantra* to them and collecting the customary donations. It was during these peregrinations that the first quickening of his conscience or soul came.

Bijaykrishna had been of a peculiarly pious and spiritual turn of mind from his infancy. Faith in the supernatural is universally the root of all religions. It is in this form that man's first consciousness of the Unseen awakens. This faith is in some found to be an original element of their very nature and constitution. They seem to be born with this overpowering instinct. Bijaykrishna belonged to this class. They had an image of Sree Krishna in the family temple of the Goswamis of Santipur where Bijaykrishna was born. It was called Shyamsundar. When a mere boy, Bijaykrishna used to go to this family sanctuary and if there were no one present there, he would try to drag this image out of its pedestal saying that he must come out and play with him. The boy Bijaykrishna could not think that this image of Shyamsundar was not like himself a living, moving human child. Though

naturally with advancing age and expanding experience this illusion that this image was a living thing or a person like himself was dispelled, the original spiritual intuitions of which this was an early and uncritical manifestation remained. And these roused in boy Bijaykrishna his first conscious spiritual questionings when he was only about twelve years of age, at the death of a dear playmate. Bijaykrishna writes in a short autobiography of his that when after the death of this friend he went out to the gardens and the fields where he had so often walked and played with him and saw the trees and the creepers there, he asked, could it be possible that while these inanimate objects were still there the friend whom he so dearly loved could alone pass out of existence for ever. He found it impossible to believe this. And this bereavement only brought him in direct inner contact with the world that lies on the other side of the grave or the cremation-ground.

But the direct awakening of Bijaykrishna's conscience or reason or soul came later, when as a young man he went about among the disciples of his family administering the traditional *mantra* to them. One day an old woman came and fell at his feet, crying for salvation. And this at once led Bijaykrishna to seriously ask himself if he was himself a saved soul? "Have I attained this *mukti* or salvation?" And if not, "How can I help another to get this *mukti* or salvation?" This was the beginning of that searching after *mukti* or salvation or God which ended in Bijaykrishna's final illumination and liberation that established his great and unique spiritual influence over the whole of Bengal.

The immediate result of this query was that Bijaykrishna renounced his hereditary profession as a *guru* or spiritual guide of ancestral flock. He commenced to search for God and salvation. His first line of enquiry was along the Vedantic line. He had already studied Sanskrit and now he applied himself to the study of the *Vedanta* under a renowned Pandit of the locality. His Vedantic studies made him an ardent Vedantin of the Samkara school. He imbibed the popular Vedantic belief that all was Brahman and he himself was none other than the Absolute. There is no room for worship or *bhakti* in this Vedantic thought and

culture. Bijaykrishna thus found himself driven into a kind of agnosticism or deism about this time. Having renounced his family vocation, Bijaykrishna resolved to earn his living by entering the medical profession and with that object coming to Calcutta he entered himself into the Vernacular Department of the Calcutta Medical College.

In the meantime Bijaykrishna was passing through a lonely moral and spiritual desert. With the awakening of his conscience following upon the incident in the house of one of his disciples, Bijaykrishna commenced to lose his belief in his ancestral faith. The attempt to follow his old family vocation became impossible. His sensitive regard for truth and honesty openly rebelled against the practice of what he had found out to be a huge lie. The help that he sought from the study of the *Vedanta*, while entirely demolishing the remnant of his old faith and drawing him away from the worship of popular Hindu gods and goddesses, gave little or no solace to his struggling soul. For a time he tried to cultivate the Samkara Vedantic idea of his essential unity with Brahman. But this found him no room for that loving communion with his Maker for which his soul had been thirsting. Worship was to Bijaykrishna the very breath of his life. Denied this privilege, he became exceedingly restless. He did not know which way to turn. He could not go back to the fancies and falsehoods of popular Hindu rituals and worships. There was no place for these in that Vedantic thought and discipline which now appealed to him as the highest and indeed the only Truth. For a time Bijaykrishna spent his days and even his nights in the torment of his soul that constantly yearned for communion and worship which however had been declared as *avidyavadvishayanee* or mere illusion by the new philosophy of life which he imbibed from his Vedantic studies. His companions in the Sanskrit College first, and in the Medical College next, felt no inner need of communion with their God. They were fully satisfied with the general run of their life, eating, drinking and being pleased with the pleasant things of the flesh, or at the most with the pleasure that came from their intellectual pursuits and exercises.

In course of his earlier goings about among his 'flock' in North Bengal, Bijaykrishna had met a small group of Brahmos whose life and conversation had by their truthfulness and purity drawn him to them. He could not as yet agree with their theology, much less could he appreciate the protest against current social usages of these people, however true and good they might be. But he was struck by their regard for truth; they never uttered an untruth, not even in joke, such really was the keen regard for veracity among that early generation not only of Brahmos but also of the general body of our new English-educated classes. And he was further struck by the absolute purity of their life and their fidelity to their nuptial vow. That was more remarkable. Because in those days sexual morality was very lax among the higher and educated middle class of Bengalee society. Notwithstanding theological and social differences, Bijaykrishna had been very powerfully drawn to these Brahmo youngmen of Bogra. They too felt drawn by the honesty and piety of this young scion of the most respected of our Vaishnava families. They perhaps saw that such transparent honesty and fervent piety could not possibly accommodate itself with the current beliefs and practices of his own people. They therefore kept themselves in touch with this young seeker after God as they already found him to be. On learning that Bijaykrishna had gone to Calcutta, and was passing through a somewhat keen spiritual crisis, they wrote to him to try and meet Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore, and if he felt so inclined occasionally to attend the weekly Divine Service of the Brahmo Samaj at Jorasanko, over which the Maharshi presided. The sermons which he preached at this time in these weekly services, were being published regularly in the *Tattvabodhinee Patrika*, which had a fairly large circulation among the new generation of cultured and educated Bengalees. His friends at Bogra referred to these sermons also in their correspondence with Bijaykrishna.

Bijaykrishna's first visit to the Brahmo Samaj gave a new turn to his life. Maharshi Devendra Nath was the head of the movement of Raja Ram Mohun Roy at this time. Keshub had just about the same time discovered the close affinity of his own faith

and ideal with those of the Brahmo Samaj and had joined it. The day when Bijaykrishna went to the weekly prayer meeting of the Samaj, Devendra Nath was himself in the pulpit, and the sermon which he preached at once made a very strong appeal to Bijaykrishna. Here he found a new solace to his troubled spirit, The prayer of the Maharshi touched Bijaykrishna deeply, In the Brahmo Samaj he found a religion that while being essentially Vedantic, was yet inspired by a spirit of devotion to Brahman and which pursued a liturgy wherein there was ample room for the cultivation of that love and worship of the Lord for which Bijaykrishna's soul had been panting "as the hart panteth for the brook". And thus in his first participation in the devotional exercises of the Brahmo Samaj, Bijaykrishna found for the first time in his new life and awakened soul-consciousness that peace which he had been vainly seeking in the arid philosophy of the Samkara-Vedanta.

From this time onward Bijaykrishna found himself forced into a soul-trying struggle between what he believed to be right and true and what the sanctified traditions of his family, his profession and his community prescribed for the discipline and conduct of the life of his people. The first conflict was with the laws of caste. As a Brahmin, Bijaykrishna had to put on the sacred thread. One day in his village home Bijaykrishna was holding forth to a company of his neighbours on the "Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man" which was at that time a prominent tenet of the Brahmo Samaj, and as a logical proposition following that ideal, he entered his protest strongly against the system of caste current in the Hindu society. Bijaykrishna, though not believing in the caste distinctions, still mechanically observed the rules enjoined upon him as a Brahmin by this institution in the matter of eating and drinking, and he still sported, in the same thoughtless way, his sacred thread. A little boy listening to his talk, asked him, after he had finished his discourse, "if he did not believe in caste, and indeed, thought it to be a sin against man and God, how was it that he had his sacred thread on him which was an essential sign of caste?" This roused Bijaykrishna's conscience to the sin of his conduct, and immediately he took off his Brahminical

thread and threw it away, thus very definitely putting himself out of the pale of the Brahminical hierarchy. This was a very serious thing in those days for a Brahmin to do, and any Brahmin found without this sign of his caste immediately found himself excommunicated. The Brahmin who gives up his thread becomes by that one act immediately a Sudra or even worse, a Chandala; for not even non-Brahmins like, for instance, Kayasthas and Vaidyas of Bengal, would touch him or take water from his hands, not to mention cooked food. It is not so now. Nobody cares to look for the sacred thread on the body of a Brahmin ; and as this sacred thread was called for the performance of the Brahmin's daily devotions, which few care to observe now, this sacred thread has practically lost its ancient sanctity. It was not so when Bijaykrishna first threw it away. His mother, the only surviving parent of his, was so overwhelmed with fear and grief at this outrage against the family laws by her son that she literally fell at his feet and threatened to kill herself unless he put on the sacred thread again. Filial piety and affection won over his moral conviction, but only for the time being. Bijaykrishna resumed his Brahminical thread out of regard for his mother's feelings. His mother-love was, in fact, a part of his religion; filial duty was as sacred to him as religious duty. Bijaykrishna never for a moment throughout his life neglected it. But resumption by him of his sacred thread made literally a hell of his inner life. He found no peace. He could hardly carry on his daily devotions in the face of this flagrant violation of his conscience. When he resolved for the second time to throw away his sacred thread, a friend who had himself little faith in these caste observances, asked him "if this inoffensive piece of soft twine stung him". Bijaykrishna replied with the intense candour characteristic of his constitution that this sacred thread literally stung him like a scorpion. Being determined upon throwing it away, he went to his mother, and told her that unless she permitted him to do it, he could not throw his thread away: but the alternative of his keeping it on would be his death. He would surely die if this struggle continued for long. This frightened his mother, who now gave her permission to Bijaykrishna to follow loyally what his conscience commanded.

But though his mother somehow reconciled herself to the heresy of her dear son, his family and community would not put up with it. Bijaykrishna was put out of caste. The present generation of our educated people can hardly realise what this social ostracism meant sixty or seventy years ago. It not only meant the break-up of tender relations of love and service with one's own flesh and blood, but also refusal of essential social services like those of domestics and barbers and washermen. But the generation to which Bijaykrishna belonged gladly faced all these persecutions for their conscience sake, and indeed found a pleasure and peace in braving these privations and sufferings which nothing else could give.

With Bijaykrishna's joining the Brahmo Samaj first as a mere worshipper in Maharshi Devendra Nath's congregation, and later on as a missionary of the Samaj along with Keshub and one or two others, commenced a life of severe and continued sufferings and sacrifices. On giving up the here ditary vocation of a Vaishnava guru that had placed his family in a position of comparative affluence, due to the fairly large contributions made by their flock, Bijaykrishna had started preparing himself for the medical profession from the dual motive of acquiring financial independence for himself and his family and also as a means of rendering much-needed service to the poor and the sick of the community. But when the call came for devoting himself to the mission work of the Samaj, he had to give up the idea of adopting the medical profession also; and henceforward he threw himself completely upon Providence for the support of himself and his family. And Providence put him under a very severe discipline at this time. For weeks together he had hardly enough to keep body and soul together. His wife and other members of the family were forced to live upon the barest doles of rice and salt, while Bijaykrishna going about preaching the new religion wherein he had found peace and spiritual inspiration and strength had sometimes to go absolutely without any food from morning to night, and was even driven, by the gnawing hunger of healthy youth, to eat clay taken up from the bed of some of the public tanks of Calcutta.

Paramhansa Ramkrishna had followed the old and mediaeval way for the training of his mind and body. Living upon the remnants of the offerings to goddess Kalee whose priest he was, Ramkrishna placed himself under mediaeval physical and psychophysical disciplines, and taking in one hand a silver coin and on the other a clod of earth, he used to transfer these from one hand to the other, mentally crying out: silver was dust; dust was silver. It was really an application or extension of the Samkara Vedantic formula of *Brahma Satya Jaganmithya* to acquire absolute indifference to the temptations of worldly wealth. Similarly, with a view to kill the lust of the flesh Ramkrishna used to get a noose placed round his neck, and the moment he felt the least little quickening of the desire for carnal gratification, he used to tighten the noose and fall into a swoon groaning with mortal pain. By these means he acquired absolute mastery over both his flesh and his mind.

Bijaykrishna did not follow these methods. In fact, these had no sanction in the highest culture for the purification of both the flesh and the mind in the Vaishnavic *Sadhana* of Bengal. Not the absolute suppression of all so-called carnal desires but their complete idealisation and spiritualisation has been the objective of our Vaishnavic culture. Though he had been married early in life like Bijaykrishna, Ramkrishna lived from his early youth as a celibate. But celibacy has no place in our Vaishnavic disciplines, specially those initiated by Sree Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, because the goal of Vaishnavic *bhakti* is the realisation of God in and through the natural affections of human relations. This was also more or less the ideal of the Shakti cult of Bengal; with this difference however that while the Shaktas sought to realise their Deity in and through the sanctified enjoyment of only one human relation or affection, namely, the filial or the child's love for its mother, the Vaishnavas sought to realise the Lord in and through all the beatitudes of the soul, resulting from the supreme romance of every human relation and affection. Still even in our *Tantric* cult and culture the pursuit of the normal methods of disciplines through regulated exercise of all the human affections had been distinctly enjoined. The *Mahanirvana Tantra*, which is really the scripture of *Brahmajnana* or Gnosticism enjoins that:

*Brahmanishtha grihashtha syat Tattvajnanaparayana
Yad yad karma prakurvita tad Brahmani samarpayet*

It was really a translation of the *karma yoga* of the *Bhagavad Geeta*. Raja Ram Mohun Roy, in our age, sought to revive this *Geeta* doctrine and ideal in combating the mediaeval traditions of his people which sanctioned the pursuit of *Brahmajnana* or the way of gnosis only to those who had renounced the world and had entered the order of the *sannyasin* or the roving mendicant. Maharshi Devendra Nath followed the ideal of the Raja in this respect and in his Brahmo teachings always held forth in favour of the life of the honest and dutiful householder as the fittest field for the cultivation of true *Brahmajnana* and the realisation of Brahman. Bijaykrishna, while accepting this highest rule of life of a Brahmo, added to it the cultivation of the human affections and the selfless service of family and society as necessary disciplines for that purification of the flesh and the illumination of the mind which constitute an essential precondition for the realisation of Brahman. And in the pursuit of this ideal, without taking the mendicant's bowl, or affecting the garb of the popular Hindu *sannyasin* or religious mendicant, he practically adopted the main rule of the order of the *sannyasin*, namely, literally living upon whatever came unasked and unsought, for meeting the needs of himself and his family. And without following the methods of the Paramhansa, Bijaykrishna reached gradually the same goal and living through the regulated and consecrated use of all his appetites and endowments, he attained that perfect purity of both flesh and mind without which no one may 'see God'. And it was this direct God-realisation which made him as powerful a spiritual influence among his people as was that of Paramhansa Ramkrishna; with this difference however that while Paramhansa's influence was Vedantic and mediaeval, Bijaykrishna's was modern and Vaishnavic.

Chapter 13

BIJAYKRISHNA AND THE BRAHMO SAMAJ

When the second schism in the Brahmo Samaj had occurred following the Cooch Behar marriage and the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj was established, the real strength of the new Samaj came from five of its leaders. Ananda Mohan Bose was the organising genius of the new movement; Durga Mohan Das was its principal financial support in the earlier stages of its life; Shivanath Shastri was the powerful and fascinating trumpeter of it; Nagendranath Chatterjee represented its intellectual force; and Bijaykrishna Goswami was universally recognised as the chief strength and inspiration of the deeper spiritual life of the Samaj. Bijaykrishna Goswami was the only member of Keshub's missionary or apostolic brotherhood who had broken away from him after the Cooch Behar marriage. His secession hurt Keshub and his Samaj far more deeply than that of any other of his following individually or than the whole body of the seceders collectively.

None of the other leaders of the new Samaj belonged to the inner circle of Keshub's movement. Ananda Mohan and Durga Mohan had, in fact, a few years before threatened to create a schism in the Samaj because of their differences with Keshub in regard to female education and female emancipation. They wanted to remove the *purdah* from the public services of the Samaj, in any case for those ladies whose conscience was hurt by it. Men and women should sit together and pray to God during congregational worships; this was their demand. They claimed it as a right so far as their own families were concerned. Keshub was not willing to concede it. Upon this a schism was threatened,

the advanced social reformers wanting to break away from Keshub and his missionary body and form a new Brahmo congregation. It was prevented by a compromise; Keshub agreed¹ to provide family pews for those members of his congregation who wanted to sit together during Divine Service outside the *purdah*.

Though the threatened breach was prevented by it, the feelings of both parties continued to be inwardly hostile to each other. Ananda Mohan and Durga Mohan did not stop by forcing this concession in regard to family pews from the minister. The difference was more fundamental; it was in regard to the whole attitude of the two parties towards the position of women in society. As they proclaimed the social equality of men and women they desired to remove all causes of inequality between the two sexes; and as lack of education of women found the strongest reason and plea for their inferior domestic and social position these Brahma reformers started a high school for the education of Brahmo ladies. Keshub on his return from England in the early seventies had himself started a Female Normal School, but the aim and intention of Keshub's female education movement was to help the women to be good daughters, sisters and wives. That the education of women, no less than the education of men, had for its essential object the fullest possible development of the human personality was not fully realised, not only by the orthodox section of the Hindu community but even by the general body of progressive Brahmos. Ananda Mohan and Durga Mohan fully realised it; and therefore they started a new school for the higher education of adult ladies of their own family and of the Samaj. This was the Banga Mahila Vidyalaya. All these activities of Ananda Mohan and his friends did not find much favour with the Brahmo minister and the inner circle of his followers. The advanced social reformers of the Samaj, represented by Ananda Mohan and Durga Mohan therefore, quite naturally welcomed this schism and the establishment of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj that promised to offer them larger field and freer scope for the realisation of their social ideals. Both Sivanath and Nagendranath belonged to this group. In fact, they represented the spirit of revolt against the new developments in Keshub's theological and

religious ideas and ideals long before the Cooch Behar marriage. Sivanath had started a Bengali monthly, the *Samadarshee*, for the ventilation of these opinions of this group of Brahmos which became a thorn on the side of the minister. The *Samadarshee* pursued fearlessly the logic of the position of the Brahmo Samaj as a religious body which did not believe in supernatural revelations or infallible religious teachers or spiritual guides. Every dogma or doctrine must be tested at the bar of reason and conscience and whatever is not able to justify itself before this court must be repudiated. Is there a God? This question must be fearlessly asked and courageously answered. Is this God a personal God? Is God a mere force like the force of gravitation or is He a conscious being? Is God a whimsical person, who can be turned away from the execution of his laws by the praises and prayers of his creature? In other words, is there any rational ground and justification for praying to God? These and similar questions were boldly raised and frankly discussed in the pages of the *Samadarshee*. Not that Sivanath himself or the other leaders of the *Samadarshee* movement themselves did not sincerely accept the general Brahmo creed regarding these vital questions but what they wanted was to ventilate all doubts with a view to their rational solution, particularly for encouraging free thinking in the community. Keshub and his missionary brotherhood looked upon all these movements with which Sivanath and Nagendranath were intimately associated with open disfavour and even persecuted them for what they believed to be the secret apostacy of these rationalists and free-thinkers. If the propaganda of the *Samadarshee* was secret apostacy in the eyes of Keshub and his missionary following, the ideals of religion of the latter were regarded by their critics in the Brahmo Samaj of the party to which Sivanath and Nagendranath belonged as secret popery and priestcraft. Behind these conflicts of ideas and opinions there was also not a little personal ill-feeling between the two groups. All these burst out into the open after the Cooch Behar marriage intensifying the previous antagonism and creating added bitterness between Keshub and his following on the one side and the leaders of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj on the other.

Pandit Bijaykrishna Goswami was the only person in the leadership of the new Samaj who had no truck with Keshub's opponents before and whose secession from the Brahmo Samaj of India and retirement from the apostolic body of that Samaj could not be ascribed even by his rankiest enemies, if he had any, to any personal motive. Bijaykrishna had belonged to the innermost circle of Keshub's disciples. Keshub had marked him out to be the special vehicle and embodiment of *bhakti* or love of God in his movement. To Bijaykrishna Keshub had delivered what he believed to be his divinely inspired message of this *bhakti*. What Ananda was to the Buddha that was Bijaykrishna to Keshub in this matter. Through Bijaykrishna, whom he initiated specially into the doctrine and practice of *bhakti*, Keshub addressed his remarkable lessons in his *Brahmo Geetopanishad*. There were two missionaries of Keshub who were universally regarded as the most spiritual among the Brahmos. One was Bijaykrishna Goswami and the other was *Sadhu* Aghorenath Gupta, who had been specially instructed and trained by Keshub for the pursuit and realisation of the ancient ideal of *yoga*. Aghorenath had passed away before the Cooch Behar marriage; Bijaykrishna was therefore the only universally recognised spiritual force in the Brahmo Samaj when this marriage took place. The breaking away of Bijaykrishna from the minister therefore hurt his movement on the one hand and on the other lent very great spiritual strength to the new Samaj. While the younger Brahmos and the more rational and intellectual section of the Samaj were drawn into it mainly by the personality and preachings of Sivanath Shastri, the elders and the more spiritually-minded came to the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj almost entirely attracted by Bijaykrishna's life and character.

Bijaykrishna's home near the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj became like a regular temple of the Lord where the candle of worship seemed to be burning almost day and night. He thus created an atmosphere of spiritual culture and devotion to God about him. This naturally attracted other devout souls. In this way he became a centre of spiritual inspiration which was not found elsewhere in the Samaj.

Bijaykrishna and some other ardent souls in the Samaj were not satisfied with the methods of spiritual culture prevailing among their Brahmo friends. They were more intellectual and ethical than spiritual. Two of the leading members of the Samaj, Kalinath Datta and Umesh Chandra Datta, had joined the sect of Bengal Vaishnavas popularly known as *Karta Bhajas* in search of the deeper realisations of the spiritual life which the ordinary disciplines of the Brahmo Samaj did not or could not offer. These *Karta Bhajas* did not impose any theological belief or social ethics upon their members though there were certainly some religious dogmas as well as a social philosophy and outlook in their culture. As regards their theology they believed that real faith must come from direct realisation of Truth and not from religious instructions or catechisms. Therefore they paid no importance to religious dogmas but only wanted to lead those who joined them by spiritual and psycho-physical disciplines and exercises to realise the Ultimate Truth directly in their own consciousness themselves. Initiation into these disciplines and exercises did not require subscribing to any dogmas. Therefore a Brahmo had not to repudiate any of the fundamental principles of the Brahmo Samaj in accepting the special disciplines of the *Karta Bhajas*. This was why men like Kalinath Datta and Umesh Chandra Datta were able to join the *Karta Bhajas* without denying their allegiance to the Brahmo Samaj or outraging their Brahmo faith. Pandit Bijaykrishna and a few other members of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj also soon joined the *Karta Bhajas* in search of a more direct realisation of God and a deeper spiritual life than what they had so far found in their own church.

The general body of Brahmos looked upon this as apostasy. The fundamental principles of the Brahmo Samaj required that a Brahmo should not accept any scripture as infallible revelation of Truth or belief in any *guru* or teacher as infallible. The *Karta Bhajas* were popularly believed to be worshippers of their *guru* as a revelation of God. In allowing themselves to be initiated into the spiritual culture of the *Karta Bhajas* these Brahmos were therefore regarded as violating the fundamental doctrine or creed of the Samaj. Both Kalinath Datta and Umesh Chandra Datta

were therefore looked upon by the majority of their Brahmo brethren as having gone away from the creed and culture of the Brahmo Samaj. When Bijaykrishna and others did the same, they too lost to some extent the confidence of their fellow Brahmos who commenced to look upon these new developments in their religious and spiritual life more or less as heresy. Some of them however' soon gave up their association with the *Karta Bhajas*. Bijaykrishna without doing so soon found that these new disciplines and associations did not bring to him that for which his soul had been hankering. He panted for direct realisation of his God. This had been the one absorbing passion of his life. This required an absolute purity of mind and body. In his later days after his great illumination Bijaykrishna used to say that absolute continence or sex purity and truthfulness were essential conditions for the realisation of God. Our mind or spirit is like a mirror and these—continence and truthfulness—were like the mercury at the back of the glass which enabled the human spirit to receive and transmit the image of the Lord. These two essential preconditions of direct realisation of God had been a special characteristic of Bijaykrishna from the days of his youth. Only once, it is said, he dreamt an evil dream. He was then in Lahore where he 'had gone in course of his missionary work in Upper India and the Punjab. This dream so worked upon his mind and emotion that he resolved to kill himself. With this object he walked to the river Ravi that flows by Lahore. There was a bridge of boats on the Ravi in those days connecting the city of Lahore with the village of Shahdara which had an old mosque held in very high regard by Moslem devotees. Bijaykrishna crossed the river on this bridge and going to the other side just below the Shahdara mosque he tied two pieces of stone about his body and was on the point of taking his plunge into the river when some one came from behind and touching him asked what was this that he was doing. He said: "This flesh of mine is evil; I have been worshipping God and preaching His religion for so many years, yet my mind has not become pure; I am capable of dreaming unholy dreams. I have no desire to keep this unclean life; I want to drown myself and finish it immediately". The stranger replied: "Will that purify your mind

and free it from unholy thought?" This simple question at once staggered Bijaykrishna. It called him to himself, and he was forced to realise that suicide was certainly not the swiftest way to purity and salvation. At this Bijaykrishna asked the stranger how at this dead hour of night he came to prevent him from carrying out his intention. He replied that he was at his prayer in the mosque at Shahdara and he heard a voice calling upon him to run immediately to the river where a great calamity was about to happen. He came and saw Bijaykrishna in the act of drowning himself. At this Bijaykrishna at once fell at the feet of the stranger crying for help to find his God and initiate to him in the way to God. The stranger said that he could not do it himself but he who would initiate him would come in the fulness of time; he need not despair. In fact, he need not go in search of his guru; when the time came his Guru would himself seek him out. After this Bijaykrishna was constantly looking for his guru, the man who would lead him to his God. This was really the psychology of Bijaykrishna's going to the *Karta Bhajas*.

Though the *Karta Bhajas* do not admit those who are not initiated in their cult into their congregation, and therefore a kind of secrecy hangs over their religious and devotional exercises, there is in reality not much mystery in these. The main features of their cult and culture are partly psycho-physical and partly spiritual. The psycho-physical part consists in the practice of *pranayama* or regulation of breath according to the process of Hindu yoga; the spiritual or devotional part consists in the repetition of the name of the Lord. The two are combined. The name of the Lord is repeated at every incoming and outgoing breath. These are also accompanied by singing of hymns. There are thus really nothing in these exercises that may be condemned *ab initio* as idolatrous or in any way against the fundamental tenets of the Brahmo Samaj. The objection of the general body of Brahmos to these exercises and disciplines came however from the position which was assigned to the guru or karta in the cult of the *Karta Bhajas*. The guru or karta was to be worshipped as the highest manifestation, or more correctly speaking, as the symbol of the Lord. One of the favourite hymns of the *Karta*

Bhajas of Bengal says: "What shall I say? Who will believe it? In this man stands the True, the Conscious and the Everlasting Blessed". The objective of the psycho-physical, mental and spiritual exercises of the cult of the *Karta Bhajas* is the realisation of God in the *guru*. Though submission to the *guru* is believed to be a fundamental tenet of the *Karta Bhaja* cult, in reality it is not so, because we find in another hymn of the *Karta Bhajas* the remarkable injunction that the disciple is not to accept on the authority of the *guru* that which is not seen by the disciple's own eyes. But notwithstanding all this, it can hardly be denied that those who join this cult practically surrender their reason and conscience almost blindfold to their *guru* and it all depends upon the personality of the *guru* whether their spiritual life is helped to grow normally or is paralysed. If he be a really illumined soul then he is able to lead the disciple to Truth; otherwise, as in every other cult, it becomes a case of the blind leading the blind.

The *Karta Bhajas* look upon the worship of sacred stones or idols as infinitely lower than the worship of the *guru*, because in worshipping these one has not to sacrifice his desires and appetites to the object of his worship. These sacred stones or idols do not enter into any conflict with those who worship them; they do not, or indeed, cannot express their pleasure or displeasure with what is done to them by their worshippers. The fear of these sacred stocks and stones is the creation of the worshippers themselves, a supernatural fear and always subjective. But the *guru* is a human being, has his likes and dislikes, can express pleasure or displeasure at the conduct of his disciple, whose personality stands over against the personality of his disciple and who can therefore always create conflict, provoking wilfulness or disobedience in the disciple. Loyalty to the *guru* therefore calls for self-disciplines that differ very materially from the disciplines which the cult of the worship of idols calls for. These latter disciplines are entirely physical, cleanliness of body and the physical surroundings of the temple of the gods, or at best psycho-physical concentration of the mind. These *Karta Bhajas* therefore do not in their esoteric exercises follow any kind of idolatry or non-human symbolism. Their only symbolism

is confined to man. Through man and in man these *Karta-Bhajas*, those that have any intelligent understanding of their cult and culture, seek to realise their God.

After his experiences at the foot of the Shahdara mosque on the bank of the Ravi at Lahore Bijaykrishna became possessed with a new hankering after direct realisation of his God. It was this hankering which took him to the *Karta Bhajas*, but he did not find what he was seeking here. He continued all the same the psycho-physical exercises and the spiritual disciplines of the *Karta Bhajas* even after he left them. Repeating the name of the Lord and *pranayama* from this time became the principal devotional exercise with him. While following these and the usual liturgy of the worship in the Brahmo Samaj Bijaykrishna continued to look for his promised *guru*. At long last he found him on the Akash Ganga hill at Gaya. One day when Bijaykrishna, at that time staying with a Brahmo friend at Gaya, went to a solitary spot on the Akash Ganga hill and gave himself up to the contemplation of the Lord, repeating His name with every incoming and outgoing breath, a saintly person suddenly appeared and taking him up on his lap initiated him, unasked and unsought, communicating to him the name of the Lord which was to be henceforth his mystic *mantra*. Bijaykrishna gave himself up immediately to his old psycho-physical and spiritual exercises with this new *mantra* or name of the Lord and presently lost consciousness of all outer objects and attained that state of complete abstraction called *samadhi* in the literature of Hindu *yoga*. And in this state of trance he found the great illumination which he had been seeking all through his life. What this illumination was it is not possible for me to say or even imagine. Those who have had it could alone understand what it was. Even they would not communicate to others through the medium of language that mystic experience. We could only see it from the outside in the great change that this experience had worked in the mind and body of Bijaykrishna. From Gaya Bijaykrishna came to Calcutta. It was during the anniversary of the Brahmo Samaj, the *Maghotsava*. On the principal day of the anniversary, 11th of Magh, as had become the practice, Bijaykrishna was invited

to take the morning service in the Samaj. But Bijaykrishna did not follow the familiar liturgy of Brahmo worship but in place of the usual adoration all that he did was to repeat one single sentence, begging the assembled worshippers to place their feet on his head. At these simple words there was an unprecedented emotional and spiritual exultation in the whole congregation. We took it then as a manifestation of the minister's spirit of humility. Those who revered him from the bottom of their hearts as a man of God were naturally moved to tears at these words from his mouth. But it was much deeper, infinitely deeper, than the ethical interpretation that was put upon it. Bijaykrishna had seen in the innermost depths of his consciousness his God and the vision was of the Spiritual Being manifested in or as *man*. But it is not given to me to reveal, or even explain that supreme mystic experience. All that could be said was that henceforth with him man became the one real symbol of the worship of God, and Bijaykrishna on this anniversary of the Brahmo Samaj was trying to worship his God through this new symbol, man. It was not any particular man but all men. In this he rationalised, universalised and spiritualised the narrow dogma of the *Karta Bhajas* and other worshippers of *guru* of popular Hinduism no less than the worshippers of Christ in Christianity.

From this time Bijaykrishna became even more than he had been before a great centre of the emotional and spiritual life of the Samaj. He was then living in the new building at the back of the prayer hall of the Samaj in Cornwallis Street which had been built for its missionaries. It was a small house, two rooms on the first floor where his family lived and two rooms on the ground floor one of which became henceforth his family sanctuary. Here almost all day long there were devotional exercises, readings from scriptures and *kirtans*. These attracted a crowd of devout souls; so day in and day out there was an unending *utsava* or festival in the residence of Bijaykrishna, and he was the centre of it all. The committee of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj however soon after deputed him to Dacca. Dacca had been the scene of Bijaykrishna's earlier activities. The Brahmo congregation at Dacca wanted him to be their minister. A mission house had

been built in the compound of the Samaj to accommodate a resident minister. Bijaykrishna went and took up his residence here and the emotional and spiritual activities started in Calcutta after his illumination were continued at Dacca. Bijaykrishna found here a freer field for his new life. In Calcutta, though he had a few devoted friends and loyal disciples, the atmosphere was not absolutely favourable for the growth of his new life. His brother ministers of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj and the Executive Committee of it, while deeply appreciating his ethical life and teachings, had scant regard for the deeper strains of his new spiritual life. Indeed, some of them commenced to be not a little suspicious of Bijaykrishna's new experiences and developments, feeling that his Vaishnavic inheritances were slowly and secretly claiming him for their own and thus taking him away from the Truth, as they believed to have been found by the Brahmo Samaj. At Dacca Bijaykrishna was free from these unfavourable influences. The mission house at Dacca was not shared by any other non-missionary as in Calcutta. It was his own house and he gathered around him a number of Brahmo workers and aspirants who had consecrated themselves exclusively to the cultivation of their religious and spiritual life. They all became as members of Bijaykrishna's family. Morning and evening he had divine service in his *ashram* and all day through there were readings from scriptures or discourses and discussions on the deeper aspects of the ethical and spiritual life. Bijaykrishna at this time allowed paintings of Radha-Krishna to be set up on the walls of his family sanctuary in this *ashram*. This offended the puritanic susceptibilities of many orthodox Brahmos. At first they commenced to raise inward protest against this. They dared not do so openly lest Bijaykrishna finding his personal freedom attacked by his Brahmo friends at Dacca should leave the *ashram* and perhaps even resign from his office as minister of the Brahmo Samaj. This would, they feared, seriously hurt the mission work of the Samaj in Dacca where Bijaykrishna's personality and character had been working a great revival not only in the Samaj but outside also among a large and increasing body of its sympathisers. But the Calcutta Brahmo Samaj heard of these

new developments of their missionary and at last they felt compelled to call for an explanation from him about these. The matter was seriously considered by the Executive Committee of the Samaj where opinion was divided; some members of the committee were not in favour of bringing any manner of pressure upon Bijaykrishna with a view to compel him to restrain his new activities. He had commenced to initiate many Brahmos and many more outsiders into the new spiritual life which he had attained. This was interpreted as introducing the system of *guruism* into the Brahmo Samaj. But Bijaykrishna never claimed any supernatural power for himself nor wanted, either directly or indirectly, to set himself up as a saviour among his disciples. He did not really break away from the fundamental social or theological position of the Brahmo Samaj. When at Dacca he arranged for the marriages of his eldest son and eldest daughter. Both these marriages were performed in strict accordance with the ritual of the Brahmo Samaj. At these marriages Babu Rajani Kanta Ghose, a Brahmo elder of the Dacca Samaj and one of its lay ministers, officiated as the priest. When some of Bijaykrishna's Hindu disciples commented on Rajani Babu's caste saying that he was not a Brahmin, Bijaykrishna replied that Rajani Babu was a much better and truer Brahmin than many Brahmins. Indeed, even after Bijaykrishna had been forced to resign from the ministry of the Brahmo Samaj he never hesitated to confess that socially he was a member of the Brahmo Samaj. But the leaders of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, or some of them at least, could not tolerate the new developments of Bijaykrishna, and he was practically compelled to resign. This happened about 1884-85. After resigning from the ministry of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj Bijaykrishna continued to live for some time at Dacca working, if I remember aright, as minister of the Eastern Bengal Brahmo Samaj. But the pressure of Calcutta opinion gradually commenced to work upon the authorities of the Dacca Samaj and Bijaykrishna retired from the mission house of that Samaj and built an *ashram* of his own at Gandaria, a suburb of Dacca.

But though his official relations with the Brahmo Samaj were cut off, his personal relations with the very large number of

Brahmos who had come under his influence continued. Some of them had been mission workers of the Sarnaj, powerful propagandists, among whom was the late Babu Monoranjan Guha Thakurata, and they broke off their old relations with the Brahmo Samaj and gathered themselves around Bijaykrishna forming a new congregation of his, or more correctly speaking, they formed a body of disciples living with Pandit Bijaykrishna and preaching the new gospel of love of God and the spiritual life which had been found through direct spiritual realisation by their master. Bijaykrishna's new propaganda had no creed, but was simply a culture. Those who wanted to accept this culture were not subjected to any religious or theological catechism; they were not asked to repudiate any faith they cherished or in which they were brought up. It might be Hindu or Moslem or Christian or any other. What people call their faith is after all practically a mere matter of opinion; and as they say while opinions differ, Truth is one, and this Truth is not a matter of tradition or inference but a matter of direct personal realisation. And the aim and object of Bijaykrishna's new activities was to lead men to this direct realisation of Truth or God, through the same processes as had helped him to this realisation.

Bijaykrishna's *guru* was (I do not know if he is still on this side) a Sikh *sadhu*. The Sikhs belong to the Bhagavata section of the Hindus. In other words, they are filiated to the way of love and faith of the Vaishnava school. The God of Guru Nanak is a Personal God and *bhakti* or love is the only way to Him. Bijaykrishna's *guru* is said to have acquired very considerable occult powers, and Bijaykrishna oftentimes met him in his astral body. Bijaykrishna at first did not believe in this astral body, but his *guru* convinced him of it by an ocular demonstration taking him out into some lonely place where a dead body was lying on the ground. He asked Bijaykrishna to hold him while he went out of his own body and entered the dead body lying before them. So saying his own body became a lifeless mass, while the corpse before them stood up and took a few steps after which his *guru* returned to his own body and the corpse once more became a corpse. Whatever may be the explanation of it, the story shows

the character and composition of Bijaykrishna's mental constitution. He could not accept, even on the authority of his *guru*, what was not satisfactorily proved by direct evidence to him. Bijaykrishna believed in occult or *yogic* power; he did not dismiss the truth of occult phenomena or *yogic* acquisitions summarily. But while believing in the truth of these, and that these powers came of themselves with the acquisition of superior spirituality, Bijaykrishna always declared that those who desired *bhakti* or love of God and His perpetual companionship did not pay any heed to these occult powers; those who did so lost *bhakti* and were deprived of that perpetual consciousness of the presence of the Divine which was the supreme passion of every true devotee of God.

In 1893 Bijaykrishna went to the great Kumbha *mela* at Allahabad and set up two images of Sree Krishna, Chaitanya, and Nityananda, there. This completed his separation from the Brahmo Samaj. This was regarded by the general body of Brahmos as a distinct return to Hindu idolatry and image worship. But the real meaning and significance of it does not seem to have been realised not only by his old Brahmo comrades but even by his new Hindu disciples and followers. This meaning came out in course of a chance conversation of Bijaykrishna on the subject of Bengal Vaishnavism. I myself heard it from his own lips that no one could understand the message of Sree Chaitanya Mahaprabhu who had not acquired a knowledge of Brahman. This knowledge of Brahman or, to use his own words, *Brahmajnan*, was an essential qualification for the culture of *Leela* or the Sport of the Lord, which *Leela* was the soul and essence of the message of Sree Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and of the Bengal school of Vaishnavism. The Sree Krishna cult was not peculiar to this school but the philosophical background of it as developed by Sree Chaitanya and his disciples and the profound spiritual and emotional realisations of it found in the Bengal school were more or less unknown to the great body of Hindu Vaishnavas in the other Indian provinces. The special object of Bijaykrishna's visit to the Kumbha *mela*, where he was at once admitted into the freemasonry of Indian saints or *sadhus* and of his subsequent

installation of the images of Gour or Sree Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Nitai or Nityananda in the *mela* itself, evidently was to deliver to the assembled *sadhus* the special message of the Bengal Vaishnava school by initiating, so far as might be, an enquiry into the life and teachings of Sree Chaitanya Mahaprabhu among the leaders of Hindu religious thought and culture who had gathered from all parts of the country at that great fair. But his old Brahmo friends could not enter into the inner meaning and spirit of it, and this action of his inevitably widened the breach between Bijaykrishna and the members of the Brahmo Samaj. It was exceedingly unfortunate because on the one side it deprived the Brahmo Samaj movement of the great spiritual asset which Bijaykrishna could have brought to it, and on the other, it helped to create around Bijaykrishna an atmosphere which was neither really rational nor deeply spiritual. Bijaykrishna was still a Brahmo as much in his social as in his religious ideas and ideals. He was a universalist. He was not a sectarian. Yet, when his old Brahmo friends cut themselves off from his intimacy and association, his new Hindu disciples commenced to interpret him as one who had discovered the mistakes of his earlier life and had gone back to that Hinduism which he had discarded. Legends soon commenced to grow around him. It was said that Bijaykrishna who had discarded his sacred thread when he joined the Brahmo Samaj went to Benares in his later days and having taken the discarded thread up again was duly administered the sacrament of *sannyasa* or religious mendicancy in accordance with current Brahminical formula. This, I know from very reliable authority, was not a fact. Bijaykrishna never received the Brahminical sacrament of *sannyasa* or religious mendicancy. The yellow robe of the mendicant which he donned in later life was originally the gift of a religious friend, and out of regard for that friendship he continued to use it to the end of his days. That was also the origin and explanation of the mass of beads that we saw on his neck in his later days. These beads did not belong to any particular sect of Hindus but to all Hindu sects as well as to Moslem *fakirs* or religious mendicants, and they were the gifts of love from numerous *sadhus* or saints. Bijaykrishna on his own initiative never provided

himself with these holy symbols. Sometime after his return from the Kumbha *mela*, when Bijaykrishna was residing in Calcutta in a house in Narendra Nath Sen Square he had a spell of illness, possibly malarial fever. His medical adviser prescribed loaf for his diet. At this one of those who were attending on him, a Hindu disciple, came and asked him from where should this loaf be brought, evidently wanting to suggest that it should be a loaf from a Brahmin shop. Bijaykrishna wondered at the question and said: "From where? Why, from the Great Eastern Hotel." For a day or two this was done, but even the Great Eastern Hotel, if it had not the odour of sanctity, had at least an unmistakable air of respectability about it. So Bijaykrishna next asked his people no longer to send for his bread to the Great Eastern Hotel but to fetch it from the Mahomedan baker at the corner of Cornwallis Street and Mechuabazar Street near his abode.

About this time I went to see him one morning in the same house at Narendra Sen Square. His Hindu disciples had been trying at that time to make him a god: and no one was permitted to be present when Bijaykrishna had his meals. He was a great tea-drinker and every morning he had his cup of tea. When his tea was brought he asked his people to serve me with the same morning tea. This friend asked me to follow him to where other people were having their tea. At this Bijaykrishna sternly asked this Hindu disciple of his to bring my tea into his room, saying "Why should he go out?"

A few days previous to this when Bijaykrishna was staying at the Calcutta residence of the well-known zeminder of Lakutia in Barisal, Babu Rakhal Chandra Ray, one of his Brahmin disciples took a *salagram* or sacred stone symbol and having sat near Bijaykrishna commenced to make offerings of flowers, leaves and sacred water muttering the usual formula of worship. The hall was covered with reed matting. One day a Mahomedan employee of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, who had known Bijaykrishna when he was a missionary of the Samaj, came to see him. On being informed of it Bijaykrishna asked him to be brought up and invited him to take his seat near the *salagram* of

his disciple on the same matting. When his visitor had left him and his Hindu disciple also had gone out with his *salagram* Bijaykrishna remarked: "When this *salagram* was brought here I did not quite like it. Here we do not favour any sectarian symbols, but I did not like to forbid it. But today my toleration has been rewarded. I acquiesced in placing the *salagram* near me; the *salagram* has tolerated the presence of Shaukat Ali (the Mahomedan employee of the Brahmo Samaj) on the same matting with him."

Chapter 14

MY INITIATION BY BIJAYKRISHNA GOSWAMI



After coming back from the Kumbha *mela* Bijaykrishna took up his residence in Calcutta in the house of Babu Rakhal Chandra Ray in Sukea Street. Rakhal Babu had been a member of the Brahmo Samaj. I think he was brought into the Samaj by Bijaykrishna himself. Rakhal Chandra Ray was however gradually caught up in the tide of Hindu religious revival and social reaction and drifted back to the old society. He had been initiated by Bijaykrishna in the new *Bhakti* cult into which he now found himself apparently eased, if it did not directly bring about his reconciliation with the old Hindu orthodoxy which he had repudiated earlier in his life. He commenced now to sport the outer signs of the Bengal Vaishnavas, not only taking back his one-time discarded Brahminical thread but also putting around his neck the Vaishnava beads of the wood of the sacred *tulsi* plant. He invited Bijaykrishna to be his guest now with his family and disciples. The house in Sukea Street became immediately like a holy place of pilgrimage to earnest seekers after God, both orthodox Hindus and Brahmos, from far and near. Every evening there was a fairly big crowd about Bijaykrishna chanting with him the name of the Lord and joining in the Vaishnavic hymns that formed an essential part of these devotional exercises. In the small hours of the morning from 3 o'clock many of these people who had received their initiation from Bijaykrishna used to congregate here. The leaders of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj became uneasy at these regular devotional gatherings at Bijaykrishna's residence in Sukea Street. Many Brahmos were

drawn to these gatherings and they were also deeply affected by the emotional exultation caused by Bijaykrishna's personality and the religious exercises at his Calcutta residence. This frightened the Brahmo leaders, particularly Pandit Sivanath Shastri, who had been feeling for some time past the very low ebb of the religious and spiritual life of the Samaj and had been planning various means for its revival. One of these means was to have meetings of the members of the Samaj every Sunday in some garden house in the suburbs of Calcutta where, besides the usual prayer, there was conversational meeting and a love feast. For some time these Sunday outings did draw fairly large numbers but the enthusiasm gradually waned as the novelty of the thing commenced to pass away. Pandit Sivanath and his friends next discovered that the real attraction of Bijaykrishna was his personality and unless they could organise a band of Brahmo worshippers who would consecrate their lives entirely to the cultivation of religion and the preaching of Brahmoism under some powerful personality who would be the centre of this new movement, the religious and spiritual life of the Samaj could not be strengthened and revived. There was one difficulty however. The Sadharan Brahmo Samaj had been given a constitution of complete democratic church government and the authorities of the Samaj did not frankly favour this new movement which by its very nature was bound to be autocratic because the leader of this new institution would have to be loyally obeyed in regard to the management of it, if not also in the matter of the ethical and spiritual disciplines of the new brotherhood. But at the same time something had to be done to uplift the very low level of the spiritual life in the community. This new institution was named *Sadhan Ashram*. The Sadharan Brahmo Samaj did not accept any responsibility of it directly and made no contribution towards it out of the Samaj funds. The members of the *Ashram* were left to find the finance for it themselves. Sivanath consecrated it in the name of the Lord, and in his faith in Divine Providence he looked up to God for the upkeep of his *Ashram*. Like George Muller he believed in the efficacy of prayer not only for meeting spiritual but even also material needs. This *Ashram* was opened

during the anniversary of the Brahmo Samaj in January, 1895, and the venerable patriarch of the Samaj, Maharshi Devendranath, came to the prayer hall of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj to preside over the inauguration of the *Ashram*. It evoked considerable enthusiasm and a good number of Brahmos offered, at the close of the service, to consecrate their lives, depending upon God for the maintenance of themselves and their families, to the service of the Brahmo Samaj. I was also moved to do it and this was that led me to give up all so-called secular work, that is work whose object was to earn money for myself and my family. The *Sadhan Ashram* movement, while it helped Sivanath Shastri to a very large measure of his personal self-fulfilment, failed in its original object of finding within the Brahmo Samaj an institution that would meet the needs that had drawn a large number of Brahmos to Bijaykrishna's home. But there were fundamental differences between this new movement of the *Sadhan Ashram* and the movement of Bijaykrishna. He did not work to gather a congregation around him. His congregation grew of itself attracted by his character and personality. He did not set himself up as a centre of a new spiritual life. Men and women flocked to him driven by the hunger of their soul. In the case of every one it might not have been a genuine spiritual attraction, but no one went to Bijaykrishna who was not moved, even if for the time being, by a genuine desire for *moksha* or salvation. Bijaykrishna's character and personality created an atmosphere of devotion about him which was the principal cause why Brahmos and Hindus crowded in his *kirtans* and religious services without troubling themselves about matters of theology or social ideals. Pandit Shastri's *Sadhan Ashram* failed because of the want of this atmosphere about it. It became in another form something like the missionary brotherhood of Keshub Chunder Sen but without, the magnetic personality of that great Brahmo minister.

Next year I was moved to seek initiation in the ethical and spiritual culture of Bijaykrishna's new life. I had known him from the time when he broke away from Keshub Chunder Sen and came and joined the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. His was the first



Brahmo family with whom I became acquainted when I was still a student in the university. His family consisted then of his mother-in-law, his wife and his three daughters and a son. I used to address his mother-in-law as mother and his wife as elder sister or *didi*. His son and daughters used to call me maternal uncle. This intimacy continued even after Bijaykrishna was made to resign his connection with the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj as its missionary. His wife had died before he came and took up his residence in Calcutta after the Kumbha *mela* at Allahabad. One of his three daughters, the second, had predeceased her mother. His eldest daughter had been married though she was living with her husband and children with Bijaykrishna at this time. His youngest daughter died when he was staying at Sukea Street at the residence of Babu Rakhal Chandra Ray.

Two incidents in connection with his youngest daughter's death have been mentioned: One, by my friend Dr. Sundari Mohan Das and the other by Babu Manoranjan Guha Thakurata. Dr. Das had been attending his daughter and when she passed away and Dr. Das went to see Bijaykrishna the latter commenced to console the doctor for the death of the patient. The other incident was still more striking. When word was brought to Bijaykrishna that his daughter had passed away he went to the chamber of death and placing his foot on the head of the dead body he lost himself in a trance and after a while he commenced to dance as if with joy. His whole body was lighted up by a halo the like of which had not been seen before. After Bijaykrishna returned to his seat Manoranjan Babu asked him the meaning of this halo and his wild joy in dancing around the dead body of his daughter. Bijaykrishna said that when he went to the chamber of death he saw there his father and mother and all his forbears who had come to receive his daughter into the next world. This was not the first time however that we heard of Bijaykrishna's communion with the other world. I distinctly remember that when living as a guest of Rakhal Babu in Sukea Street before the death of his own daughter, Bijaykrishna one day told Rakhal Babu that his first wife and eldest daughter, who had been married to the eldest son of Dwijendranath Tagore and who had gone

over to the other side, had been present in that very room a little while ago. In fact, we had heard of the psychic endowments of Bijaykrishna even when he was in the Brahmo Samaj. When one of his daughters died in Calcutta Bijaykrishna was not present. He had gone to some *moffusil* town—was it Hazaribagh—to conduct the anniversary proceedings of the local Samaj. He heard the news of his daughter's illness there. Returning to Calcutta he went direct from the station to the house of his friend Guru Charan Mahalanobis and before the news of his bereavement had been communicated to him he said that he already knew that the child had passed away because she had been constantly moving about him; and driving with his friend Mahalanobis to his residence he started a hymn and singing it entered his house, thus giving no chance to the bereaved family to burst out into lamentations. Another incident of those early days comes to my mind here. Bijaykrishna had gone to preside over the anniversary celebrations of the Rampurhat Brahmo Samaj. Babu Nagendranath Chatterjee was also to have joined him there. But he could not come with Bijaykrishna and it **was** indeed doubtful whether he would be able to come at all. **But** he did come after all and on the morning of the day when he arrived Pandit Bijaykrishna asked his host to arrange for Babu Nagendranath's hospitality as he was coming. There were **many** similar incidents in the life of Bijaykrishna that proved his **unusual** psychic powers even when he was a missionary of the Brahmo Samaj. Those who believed in these powers did not wonder therefore at the mighty change that came over him in his later life and led to his separation from the Brahmo Samaj.

Next year, in 1895, I received my initiation from him. There was nothing in it that in any way militated against my lifelong Brahmo convictions. Bijaykrishna did not demand the surrender of my reason or conscience or will to him. He did not claim any supernatural power or authority; he did not demand the abjuration of my faith according to the creed of the Brahmo Samaj. All that he did was to give me a *mantra* which was only the name of Brahman and asked me to repeat this text mentally at least for some time every day or as often as I found myself free from

other preoccupations. This *mantra* was to be repeated with the special breathing exercise called *pranayama* in the literature of Hindu yoga. He showed me the process and asked me to follow him in this exercise. The instructions with which I was initiated were few and absolutely unexceptionable even from the standpoint of Brahmo rationalism. They were; firstly, to abstain from taking meat or eggs; secondly, not to take leavings of any other person; thirdly, to speak ill of no one, and fourthly, to honour the men of God or *sadhus*. He explained who a *sadhu* was. The person whose presence or conversation quickened our consciousness of God was a *sadhu*. A *sadhu* was not known by his creed or his colour or his dress or anything else, but by this one supreme test, namely, whether, when we found ourselves in his presence, all our evil thoughts were banished as if by magic and our mind and soul were filled without any effort on our part by the presence of and hankering after God.

Immediately after my initiation I observed a strange change in me. The name of Brahman which Bijaykrishna had given me and which I was asked to repeat with every incoming and outgoing breath, commenced to be repeated in me almost automatically. When I lost consciousness in sleep this name was the last thing of which I was conscious and when I awoke from my sleep, whether it was during the day or at night, the first thing that I became conscious of was this automatic repetition of the *mantra* which Bijaykrishna had given me. I seemed to be living in a perpetual consciousness of the Divine presence at this time but it did not last long. The experience however was enough to reveal to me the meaning of what is called *sakti-sanchara* or the infusion of spiritual force in the literature of Hindu yoga. Expressed in the terms of modern thought it is nothing more or less than hypnotism. The *guru* hypnotises the disciple and by giving him a foretaste of the ultimate end and objective of the new disciplines into which he is being initiated, this hypnotism supplies an incentive for the pursuit of these spiritual exercises and disciplines. Good subjects after their initiation at once find themselves in this high state of spiritual exultation and though it passes away, as it must inevitably because it is something that has been induced from outside by

the psychic power of the *guru*, it is meant to help in the laborious process of self-purification.

As regards the psycho-physical exercise of *pranayama* people think it something supernatural or mystic. But my personal experience of it did not support or justify these interpretations. There is nothing supernatural or mystic in this particular process of breath-regulation which is called *pranayama*. The musician always goes through this process while practising his art without knowing it. The hymns of the Brahmo Samaj and particularly the *kirtans* which we have adopted or adapted from the Vaishnavic hymnology are all practical *pranayama* and the object of this psycho-physical exercise is really to help the stimulation of our nerve centres and thus contribute to emotional excitement or exultation. Bijaykrishna Goswami did not explain all these to me when I received my initiation from him, but I discovered it through my personal experience of the phenomenon.

Thus it will be seen that in going to him I did not renounce the least little jot or little of my Brahmo convictions. Bijaykrishna himself also in accepting his own initiation from his *guru* did not fall away from the faith and principles of the Brahmo Samaj. In his later days he might have transcended some of those principles as he was bound to do with larger emotional and spiritual experiences, but transcending a faith or opinion was not repudiating it.

My initiation did not affect my Brahmo loyalties. I neither believed in the supernatural position assigned to the *guru* by mediaeval Hinduism nor did I surrender myself, body and soul, to my *guru* as is usually expected in mediaeval Hindu system. The infallibility of the *guru* had never been an article of my creed before I accepted my initiation from Bijaykrishna nor did it become so after my initiation. In fact, Bijaykrishna himself never suggested such a heresy to his old Brahmoism as part of his new disciplines. He himself did not accept his own *guru* in this sense. I did not accept the truth or utility of the popular Hindu symbols of idolatry. As regards caste I was not required to observe it by the new culture. In fact, the Brahminical social economy had absolutely nothing to do with the *sadhana* which Bijaykrishna gave me. In

all these matters his disciples were left absolutely free to follow their faiths and principles. Those who believed in idolatry and caste were free to follow that belief; those who did not believe in these were not called upon to obey them. Bijaykrishna himself did not worship any image or observe in his personal life the rules of Hindu caste. He once went to see a saintly Moslem, a woman. It is usual with our *sadhus* to take some presents to any saintly person they go to meet. Bijaykrishna when he went to see this lady, took some ripe guavas. This saintly Moslem lady accepted Bijaykrishna's present, and taking up one of the fruits she had a bite of it and returned the other half to Bijaykrishna who unhesitatingly put it in his own mouth and ate it showing that he did not observe not only the laws of Hindu caste but even the popular Hindu notion regarding the untouchability of Moslems. In all these theological and social matters therefore I had not to obey any law or custom which was against the principles of the Brahmo Samaj. In my outer life my initiation therefore made absolutely no difference. Any change of this kind was never wanted by my *guru*.

But there was still a very marked change in my inner life and outlook. The *mantra* which I received from Bijaykrishna became a constant companion of my mind and spirit replacing the formal adoration of Brahman of the Brahmo Samaj. Reading or writing or walking or lying down, in the solitude of my room or in crowded public meetings I was able to worship my God through this new method of repeating His name. One day I asked Bijaykrishna how I should worship Brahman—perform His *upasana*. I think Bijaykrishna was then living under a vow of absolute silence. But he answered whatever he was asked in writing for which he had a slate and a pencil by him always; and he wrote in answer to my question that real adoration of Brahman was impossible until all the activities of our outer senses and even the mind itself had completely ceased. It was then and then only that the direct realisation of Brahman came and when that state was reached Brahman would be worshipped in "spirit and in truth". My next question was: "I had not attained that high state of *samadhi*; what were I to do to worship my God?" He wrote in reply, "That

for those who had not attained that state, the method of Divine worship was through readings from suitable scriptures, singing of hymns delineating the different attributes of the Deity, recitation aloud of *stotras*, dedication to Him of our desires and aspirations, prayers to Him for what we sorely needed and the cultivation of the company of devout saints and seers. By these means as well as by the repetition of His sacred name and the pursuit of the laws of personal cleanliness and mental purity the worshipper might, gradually qualify himself for that high spiritual state called *samadhi* wherein only the real worship of Brahman was possible." I tried to follow this prescription of his from this time onward. I had already given up all so-called secular occupations. I commenced to devote a greater part of my time from now to readings from scriptures and singing hymns, reciting *stotras* and visiting Bijaykrishna as often as it was possible. I also commenced to regulate my diet living on practically one meal a day, often cooked by myself, which consisted of boiled rice and vegetables, taking at night, if I felt hungry, a few pieces of *puri* from the bazar. These disciplines commenced to work a change in my inner life. I tried at this time to follow the rule of complete *ahimsa* or non-violence. I would not kill any living thing, not even a bug or an ant or a centepede. I was at this time living in a one-storied house which was infested by these stinging insects, and because I would not hurt them I found to my surprise that even they would not hurt me or any member of my family. Some day I found some of these inside the folds of my own *dhoti*, and I had only to shake these off and they quietly went away to their shelter. This experience was repeated many times and it helped me to the conviction that even so-called lower animals never hurt us except in fear of being hurt by us. I had no difficulty now in believing the numerous stories of holy men and women who are said to have freely moved among ferocious animals and venomous vipers without being hurt by them. But this *ahimsa* must be so cultivated that it becomes part of the mental and the physical that is, the nervous constitution of the man or woman, something very much more indeed than so-called non-violence.

From this I was led at this time to abjure all manner of competition with any one, which in reality is a form of *himsa* or violence. I even commenced to restrain myself from running to a moving tram-car with a view to take a seat therein depriving thereby another person from travelling by that car. I was led to do this by the thought that the business that required the presence of another passenger at his destination might be far more urgent than mine. Who knows that a sick child was not lying at his home and he was rushing to get medical help for it. The same thought prevented me from keeping anything for tomorrow if and when a brother came and asked for my help today. Who knows, I used to think, that his need was not greater than mine or that I myself or the members of my family for whom I was keeping this provision for the next day would not be called away before then from this world. What right had I, I used to think, to worry about the future when there was destitution and starvation somewhere within my knowledge in the immediate present. From that time onward I felt convinced that all competition, economic or otherwise, was a sin against God and man; and though I have not been able to uniformly follow this rule of conduct the conviction that competition is wrong abides still in me. All this however is a verification of the saying of Emerson that while "our faith is transitory, our sin is habitual". Even this transient faith I never had until I received that new sacrament from my *guru*. I very rarely received any oral instruction from him. In fact, I was not even privileged to profit by his personal contact and conversations as much as, if I really cared for it, I might have received. I kept myself aloof very frequently from his association because I found it difficult, if not possible, to accommodate myself to the atmosphere of mediaeval faiths and ideals which many of his Hindu disciples created around him. But this aloofness did not hurt me seriously because the very physical distance that I kept between myself and my *guru*, I now realise, helped me to his inner spiritual inspiration which I have always felt no less after he passed over to the other side than when he was on this side. The greatest wonder which he had worked in me was in the new meaning of ancient scriptures which has been revealed to me gradually during the past thirty-five years and more since I was graciously accepted by him.

Chapter 15

MY FIRST VISIT TO ENGLAND



In September 1898 I left for England with a scholarship granted by the British and Foreign Unitarian Association to mission workers of the Brahmo Samaj for helping them to take a two years' course at the New Manchester College in Oxford. This college had been established originally at Manchester for training for the Unitarian Ministry. From Manchester it was transferred to Oxford to be in close touch with the life of that old British university. Though it was not recognised by the university its students could attend the lectures of the university and generally share the intellectual and moral life of that ancient seat of learning. The University of Oxford was attached to the Church of England. Non-conformists had no rightful place in it but the non-conformists' theological seminary which came into existence for training members of these denominations for their ministry was like the Unitarian College located in Oxford and for the same reason. The Manchester New College and the Mansfield College thus came into being in an informal way associated with the intellectual and moral life of Oxford. In 1881 Pandit Sivanath Shastri had been to England. He was naturally received with friendly greetings by the English Unitarians and Theists. From the days of Raja Ram Mohan Roy the Brahmo Samaj had received the peternal sympathy of British and American Unitarians. When Keshub Chunder Sen early in the seventies of the last century went to England the earlier relations between the Brahmo Samaj in India and the Unitarians in England were revived and strengthened. The visit of Sivanath Shastri however led to fresh developments

in the relations of the Brahmo Samaj with the Unitarians of England. Dr. S.T. Sunderland was deputed by the British and Foreign Unitarian Association of England to come on a missionary visit to India and study the Brahmo Samaj movement here with a view specially to find out if there were any opening for the establishment of regular and closer cooperation between the Brahmo Samaj and the Unitarian organisation. Dr. Sunderland spent about a year in India. On his return the British and Foreign Unitarian Association deputed another Unitarian Minister, Rev. Mr. Harwood to follow up the work initiated by Dr. Sunderland. These visits led the British and Foreign Unitarian Association to offer a scholarship of the value of £100 a year to workers and missionaries of the Brahmo Samaj who would desire to take a course in the Manchester New College. A committee of elected representatives of the three sections of the Brahmo Samaj was set up for the selection of these scholars. The first was the late Bhai Pramatha Lal Sen, a nephew of Keshub Chunder Sen, who, though not as yet ordained as a missionary of the New Dispensation, had consecrated his life to the ministration of that Samaj. This was, I think, in 1896. In 1897 the choice of the Brahmo Samaj Committee fell on a friend (whose name I just forget) but he was not able to accept this scholarship and go to England. So in 1898 there were two vacancies. To one of these I was appointed; the other was given to Babu Hem Chandra Sarkar, who having taken his M.A. degree in the Calcutta University had joined the *Sadhan Ashram* of Pandit Sivanath Shastri. The Unitarian Association undertook to pay only for the expenses of these scholars in England but they would have to find money for their passage and outfit. After I was selected I made a somewhat extended tour to collect this money. During this tour I, for the first time in my life, made the acquaintance of some English officials. When I went to Silchar in course of this missionary tour my English lectures were attended by Captain Herbert, Deputy Commissioner of Silchar. Captain Herbert and other officials of the place took very kindly to me and collected a small purse towards my passage fund. From Silchar I went to Shillong. Sir Henry Cotton was at that time the chief commissioner

of Assam. I had known him in Calcutta when he was chief secretary to the Government of Bengal. Sir Henry, though a member of the Indian Civil Service, and therefore a 'bureaucrat' was however a very genial man. As soon as I arrived at Shillong, I wrote to him announcing the fact saying that I did not want in view of our old acquaintance that he should learn of my presence in his capital from the public notices of my lecture. Sir Henry immediately replied that he would be glad to see me at the Government House the same afternoon at 3. My visit to the chief commissioner disturbed the dovecot of his official entourage. His private secretary turning up at the Government House when the chief was closeted with me commenced to run up and down the verandah wondering who this native was who had been received by his chief without his knowledge.

On Wednesday the 21st of September, 1898, I left for Bombay by the B.N. R. to sail by the mailboat S.S. Egypt on the following Saturday the 24th. Next day arriving at Nagpur I found myself impelled to send a wire to Bijaykrishna Goswami who was then living at Puri. I felt sorry that I had not asked for his blessings on this enterprise of mine. Having sent the wire I forgot all about it. On going into my cabin when the steamer was already on the high seas, I saw a telegram on my wash-stand. The sight of it frightened me because I thought that this telegram must have been from my home and perhaps it called me back for some serious illness in my family. With trembling fingers I tore open the cover and found that it was a telegram from Bijaykrishna Goswami, who in reply to my wire from Nagpur wrote: "God bless you". He passed away when I was in England. On my return however I learnt that when my telegram was taken to him he sat for a while absorbed in *dhyan* or devotional abstraction and then dictated the terms of the reply to me. My telegram however caused some little flutter among his close disciples and they commenced to talk about my visit to England. Bijaykrishna asked what was it that was troubling them. They said: "How would it be possible for me to observe the regulations regarding food and drink of the disciplines of his *sadhan*?" Bijaykrishna replied: "Bipin Babu has been freed from those restrictions." This showed how

my Guru looked upon the disciplines of his *sadhan* as even externals and they were not absolutely binding upon every one regardless of his mental state and outer conditions of life.

Leaving the boat at Marseilles I travelled overland and crossed the English Channel from Calais to Dover. Mr. Harinath De sailed by the same boat with me from Bombay and we both travelled by the same train from Marseilles to London. He was then studying at Oxford and was returning to his university after spending the summer vacation with his people in Raipur. We travelled second class and the second saloon was crowded by Anglo-Indians, mostly assistants in the mercantile offices in Calcutta and Bombay. During the first part of our journey from Bombay to Suez, these Anglo-Indians held themselves aloof from us but after we entered the Suez Canal they commenced to thaw until by the time we crossed the Mediterranean and arrived at Marseilles this caste feeling completely disappeared. This led me to give a new name to the Mediterranean; I described it as the waters of Lethe. Englishmen and Europeans coming out to India forgot the native suavity of their character as soon as they entered the Suez Canal and found themselves in Asiatic waters. Similarly Anglo-Indians, as soon as they crossed the Suez Canal and entered the Mediterranean all their caste pride dropped from them as yellow leaves in autumn.

Landing at Marseilles travelling through France, I was struck by the difference between our rural areas and those of Europe. The hand of man was in everything that I saw; there was no rank vegetation, but the whole land by the railway was carefully cultivated. Even the pumpkins of which we take absolutely no care seemed to have been lovingly tended so that every side of the fruit could have the rays of the sun beating on it and painting it with its red colour. The whole countryside was a thing of beauty created by man. Arriving at Paris the next morning I could not manage to have time for breakfast at the railway station, but going to my train I bought a pear the like of which I had never seen or tasted before. I paid 10 francs for it; it was sufficient breakfast for me. Another experience of my travel from Marseilles to Calais was the absolute want of drinking water. There was a

jet of water coming from a tap in the lavatory of the railway carriage, but it was not drinking water. Frenchmen, I discovered, did not drink water. Bottles of light wine could be found in all the buffets or roadside refreshment rooms. This was the only drink available on the train, but I had never in all my life tasted wine; I could not follow the custom of the country. All that I did to quench my thirst was to suck oranges and grapes. But these did not satisfy my native thirst for water, and I passed a rather painful time until I crossed the Channel and found myself on English soil.

It was already dark—in October the lighting up in London was generally between 3 and 4—when I got down from the train at Charing Cross. I had been advised by the secretary of the Unitarian Association that if I arrived in London on any week-day, someone from his office would meet me. If it was a Sunday, I was asked to take a cab and drive to Anderton's Hotel on the Strand. A room had been secured for me there, and I would get everything that I wanted. Anderton's was a decent though not a very costly place. No such feeling stirred within me when I first saw 'the lights of London' as I had read of in English books describing the first visit of people from the provinces to their chief city. The next morning however I had a new experience. I was an early riser, but early in England is not what we call early here. I woke up a little after six, and feeling very cold I wanted the fire in my room to be lighted, and I rang for the maid in charge of my room. I rang and rang, almost interminably for some time. But nobody answered my bell. This somewhat put me out. I took it as deliberate inattention, and asked myself if it was due to my colour. At about 8 o'clock the maid came to my room, and I asked her how was it that though I had been ringing my bell for more than an hour, nobody attended to it. She said, "The servants are not up before half past seven". This was my first experience of the way of servants in English hotels and homes.

Besides the officials of the Unitarian Association, I had two old English friends in London, whose acquaintance I had made in India. One was Mr W.S. Caine, the well-known temperance worker and Liberal politician; the other was his secretary, Mr Grubb. Mr Grubb was sent by Mr Caine to my hotel, asked to

render such help as I might require in the matter of sightseeing and shopping. Mr. Caine, I think, was not in London at that time. I stayed in London for two or three days before going to Oxford.

The Manchester College was not at that time a residential college. Students had to live outside in licensed apartments or boarding houses. Baba Pramatha Lal Sen, who had just finished his course in the Manchester College, recommended me to his landlady, Mrs. Campbell. Her husband was a tailor, and they added to their income by taking in one or two students of the university. Mrs. Campbell was a very decent woman, reasonable in her charges, and not at all of the type of English landladies. The principal of the college was the Rev. Dr. Drummond. Dr. Drummond's was a very quiet personality. He was really a scholarly divine regarded even in university circles in Oxford as an authority in the New Testament theology. He represented the old and orthodox school of Unitarianism. He did not, of course, believe in the dogma of incarnation ; Christ was not God, "the very God of God", to quote the Fourth Gospel, but he was the most perfect man, none superior to him neither among the ancients nor among the moderns ; the character of Christ made Christianity the best, the highest and the most spiritual of existing world religions. His reverence for Christ lent to Dr. Drummond's Unitarianism a somewhat narrow outlook, but at the same time it contributed to his character and personality a depth or spirituality which was not found in the vast majority of the members of his denomination. There was no doubt a tinge of mediaevalism in Dr. Drummond, but while it deepened his faith it did not detract from his loyalty to the fundamentals of his denomination and church. Dr. Drummond was a man of very few words and it stood somewhat in the way of his popularity with his students.

Dr. Estling Carpenter, the vice-principal, was a very different type of man, far more modern in his mind and outlook than the principal. Dr. Carpenter was a nephew of Miss Carpenter, who had come to India, I think, more than once, as secretary of the National Indian Association, London, which was established for the promotion of social reform, particularly female education among the Indians and liberation of Indian women from the

thralldom of caste and customs. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, during his visit to Bristol, became very friendly with the Carpenters, and Miss Carpenter had written a book on the 'Last Days of Raja Ram Mohan Roy', which was in the early seventies of the last century practically the only available record of the Raja's life and mission. Dr. Carpenter was professor of Old Testament history and religion and Comparative Theology. His interests were however not confined to these studies. He was a somewhat powerful speaker, and had high literary tastes and talents. He loved to freely mix with his students and invited them to his house every now and then on Sunday afternoons, where they had tea and literary discussions.

The professor of Philosophy was Dr. Upton. I think he was the oldest of the professors in the Manchester New College when I went there. Dr. Upton also was a very genial person, simple and unostentatious like our own Pandits of the old school. Dr. Upton lived outside Oxford in the old house which had been the residence of Cardinal Newman at one time. It was a very old house and I could never enter it without the memories of that learned and saintly person crowding into my mind, particularly his immortal hymn

Lead Kindly Light, Lead Thou Me On

with all the well-known associations that inspired it. Like Dr. Carpenter Dr. Upton also used to invite the students of the Manchester College singly to his home. He loved to have quiet discussions with them on matters pertaining to the special subject of his lectures. I did not however attend his lectures. After his friendly talk with me he himself told me that there was no need for me to attend his lectures. Dr. Upton was, I think, a fellow student of our friend, Dr. Prasanna Kumar Roy. Both of them had read their philosophy under Dr. Martineau. One experience of my life in Oxford has always come to my mind whenever I have thought of Dr. Upton. Dr. Upton had an Anglo-Indian as his neighbour. He shall be nameless in this record. He had been a district judge near Calcutta. When I went to Oxford some of my

missionary friends in Calcutta who had known me as a temperance worker wrote to their friends in London and Oxford about me. This gentleman also received one of these letters. One day he came to see me in my lodgings, I was not then in. On my return I found my landlady in very high spirits because a baronet had called on me, and had left his card for me. She particularly asked me to pay a return visit to him. Before doing so I wrote however acknowledging his kindly call, and telling him that when next I went to his village I would drop in. This I did one Saturday afternoon. I spent, I think, about three hours with him. He evidently loved to talk of his old friends in Bengal. His wife and children had gone out at that time. When they returned after 4, and he had to go to them to take his tea, he thanked me for my visit and asked me where I was going. I told him that I would look up Dr. Upton before going to my lodgings. At this he seemed to be greatly relieved and remarked, "Will Dr. Upton give you a cup of tea?" I said, "Certainly. He never allows me to go back from his house without it."

I was in the Manchester College only for a year or more correctly only for one session, from October, 1898 to June, 1899. During this time I spent most of my weekends preaching from different Unitarian pulpits. The Rev. Mr. Travers, who was minister in charge of the Unitarian Chapel in Carlisle, was at that time a student in the Manchester New College, taking a course of philosophy and theology with a view to better equip him for his work. During the Christmas recess he invited me to his pulpit. A report of my service and sermon was published in the official organ of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association, and this created a great opening for my preaching and lecturing in the Unitarian centres all over England and Scotland. I was paid a guinea and sometimes also my actual train-fare from and to Oxford in addition to this fee. Though this financial help was not negligible considering that I had to provide for my family in Calcutta by my contributions to the press in India and my earning in England, the extensive and intimate knowledge of the British Isles and the middle classes of English society was exceedingly valuable. I discovered during my visit that we could never really know and

understand any people by reading their literature or stories of their life. I had a fair acquaintance with English novels, but I could not visualise the scenes and characters of these works before I had been brought into direct contact with English life. The picture had of course its light and shade. There were both good and evil in English life and society as there were in our own. But while I was not blind to the dark side of English civilisation neither could I honestly ignore the bright side of it.

The very first thing that impressed me at Oxford was the lower level of the education and culture of the general run of undergraduates and graduates of that famous British university. I felt that if we took at random a dozen students from Oxford and a similar number from one of our universities, for instance, Calcutta, (of the old days with which I was familiar), the latter did not at all suffer in comparison with the former, particularly so far as their general knowledge went. For one thing, I found out that we in Calcutta knew the English poets more intimately than did the ordinary Oxford student. But take these two sets up again after 10 years, and we shall find a very wide difference between these two, the English graduates standing intellectually head over shoulder if not indeed much higher than the Indian. The reason of it is the difference in the surroundings of the two sets in their after-life. This fact made a very deep impression upon me, lending a new strength and inspiration to my lifelong loyalties to social reform and political freedom.

Mr W.S. Caine also procured many public engagements for me during my stay in Oxford, in connection with the propaganda of the British Temperance Association. I had first met Mr. Caine in Calcutta during the Congress of 1891 at a temperance demonstration in Wellington Square, where I was invited to speak. Mr Caine had started a special association for promotion of temperance in India, the Anglo-Indian Temperance Association. Mr Caine next met me at the house of an old friend, Babu Sashipada Banerjee in Baranagore. Sashipada Babu had got up a small function in the Baranagore Workingman's Institute, which was housed in a special hall built by Sashipada Babu in the compound of his dwelling house. After the public meeting we

had tea with Mr and Mrs Banerjee. I remember it particularly because of Mr Caine's great liking for our *sandesh*, which he took liberally. It was here that Mr Caine invited me to work for his association in Bengal as a paid worker. I refused his kindly offer telling him that the moment I accepted any payment for my work the moral appeal of it would be lost, and my people would class me with the paid agents or lecturers of the Christian missions in the country. We had known one of these gentlemen, who used to ask us whenever we met how was our soul. A few years later one of my friends met him, but he no longer enquired after his soul. My friend asked how was it that he did not repeat his old enquiry. He replied, "Don't you know that I have resigned from that work." I could not afford, I told Mr. Caine, to be identified with the paid workers of our Christian missions. I had my mission work to do in connection with the Brahmo Samaj movement. The moment I accepted any salary from him, I would lower myself in the estimation of my people, but I agreed to make temperance as a part of my Brahmo mission work. Later on, I suggested that I had to depend for my itinerary upon invitations from the *muffasil* organisations of the Brahmo Samaj who paid all my travelling expenses. I could do temperance work even when no such invitations came if his association agreed to pay my actual travelling expenses. Mr Caine agreed to do so, and offered to make a fixed monthly contribution towards my travelling expenses in the *muffasil*. Of course, it was clearly understood that my temperance propaganda would be a part of my general Brahmo propaganda. Mr Caine had taken so kindly to me that he once wrote in the *Abkari*, the official organ of the Anglo-Indian Temperance Association, that he would like some day to invite me to England for a lecture tour in the British Isles under the auspices of the British Temperance Association. When, however, I went of myself to England, he offered to utilise me during the recess in my college for temperance work. During Christmas 1898 and Easter 1899 I went about with Mr Caine to various temperance gatherings in England, Wales and Scotland. Mr Caine not only paid my travelling and hotel expenses but also a decent fee for every meeting that I attended. He paid these out of his

own pocket, but he had a way of his own in these matters. Whenever he went for temperance work, he charged his expenses to the local organisation; but while presenting his bill he also paid a cheque covering the amount of it to the treasury of the organisation concerned. He did the same thing in my case also. I asked him why did he do this. The reply was characteristic not only of Mr Caine personally but of the business habit of the race to which he belonged. He said "If I don't charge anything for my services they are not recorded, and my contributions towards the expenses of the organisation are not acknowledged; but here my cheque goes to the account of the organisation, and is recorded and acknowledged."

I have referred already to my first visit to Carlisle. Here I was the guest of one of the leading members of Mr. Travers' congregation, Mr Marchent; Mr and Mrs. Marchents' were one of the most valuable friendships that I made during my first English visit. Mr Marchent came, I think, of French stock. He was employed, if I remember aright, in the local bank. Mrs. Marchent was a highly spiritual-minded lady. She had theosophical tendencies, and was something of a mystic. The mystic element of the theism of the Brahmo Samaj naturally appealed to her; and this was the principal bond of our friendship.

Another Unitarian congregation to which I was invited off and on because of the prolonged illness of its minister was that of New Castle on the Tyne. It was a much bigger congregation than that of Carlisle. Here also I made intimate friends of Mr Coysh and his family. Mr Coysh was a leading member of the New Castle Unitarian Church; and whenever I was invited to preach there Mr and Mrs Coysh offered me hospitality. Their home was almost like a home to me. Mr Coysh had a young daughter, about the age of my eldest daughter, whom I had left at home and this added to the affection which I felt for this family. Mr Coysh was almost like a brother to me, and when in the summer of 1899 my college was dismissed and I had a number of engagements in the North, in Carlisle and Cendal in the Lake District, and other neighbouring places, Mr and Mrs Coysh asked me instead of running to and fro between London and these

places to make their home my permanent quarters until I had finished all my engagements in the neighbouring districts.

The annual meeting of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association was held at the beginning of the summer recess in our college. This is the annual festival of the British Unitarians, something like the *Maghotsava* or the anniversary of our own Brahmo Samaj. There were various functions during this week in London; one of these was a public dinner in Essex Hall. It was at this dinner that I first saw Sir Rufus Issac, who was pointed out to me as a prominent member of the English Bar, and a supporter of the Unitarian movement. He subsequently rose to be the Lord Chief Justice of England and came out later on as the Viceroy and Governor-General of India. Of course, I had no part in the functions of this anniversary; as a mere student I could possibly have none? If I had gone to England as a representative of the Brahmo Samaj in India, it might have been different. But as a student in the Manchester New College I could not expect to be treated as a spokesman of the Brahmo Samaj. Not that I did not feel it, but I had no right to do so; in fact, it was doubtful whether in accepting the generous help of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association towards the preparation of our men for the Brahmo ministry, the Brahmo Samaj had not sacrificed somewhat of its legitimate self-respect. Of course, I knew that we had many things to learn from our British friends of the liberal religious group, but we ought not to have forgotten that we have as much, if not more, to give out of the spiritual treasures of our race and culture to the advanced religious thinkers of the other nations of the world. In accepting the generous offer of the Unitarian Association of pecuniary help to our work we had, whether consciously or unconsciously, very seriously hurt our right to help them also in the realisation of the ideals of modern liberal religion. This fact was very strongly brought home to me during the anniversary week of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association.

There were two Unitarian congregations in Birmingham, and I was invited to one of these many times because at that time it had no regular minister. This chapel was, I think, a workingmen's chapel. The other chapel belonged to the wealthier and more

aristocratic section of the community. I was invited to this latter congregation, I think, only once. I became very friendly with the family of one of the officers of the former congregation, modest, homely, comparatively poor people; I say comparatively because they would not be really counted as poor in our society. Theirs was a small but fairly well-appointed house with a back flower garden, the windows in front were adorned with flower pots, the sitting or reception room had a piano. The master of the house was an engine-driver. This was my first experience of the home of a British workingman and it made a profound impression upon me of the general culture and refinement of the comparatively better-off sections of the British working classes, bringing it home to me that even the British workingmen lived not by bread alone. One incident in connection with my visits to this Unitarian congregation in Birmingham may be recorded. I was presiding over the Harvest Festival of this congregation one Sunday morning. The church was decorated with greens and flowers. Sheaves of ripe wheat and barley and fresh vegetables and the fruits of the season were heaped upon a table. The congregation also, particularly young boys and girls, came in their gala dress. The whole scene presented a mass of colours. It was really a gay and festive gathering. I took the service and preached the sermon, the subject of which I do not remember. A local pressman had been, I understood afterwards, going about the Birmingham churches, and giving his impressions through a local paper. His impression of my service was somewhat singular. One phrase of his has stuck to my memory through all these years. After giving a brief summary of my sermon, he said: "When the minister had finished his subject he sat down like a gentleman without a word of peroration."

As I have said, I was invited once to the pulpit of the other Unitarian chapel in Birmingham situated in the aristocratic quarter of the town. The morning service was rather poorly attended. I had never found such a poor audience in any chapel where I had been advertised to preach. The audience was poor, and the whole service was uninspiring. On my return from the chapel my host consoled me with the remark that the attendance was poor but I

had quality in the morning, and he assured me that I would have quantity in the evening. This remark revealed to me the mentality of the higher class of even British Unitarians. Their liberal religious creed notwithstanding, they had not been able to escape the general attitude of the wealthier classes of their society. These experiences brought home to me the very wide difference in regard to man as between India and England. The humanity of the British people is skin-deep; they have no castes, it is true, but the class feeling among them is really even worse from the humanitarian point of view than our caste feeling. In fact, until recently we had really no caste feeling. Caste did not or could not destroy the inherent ideals of humanity or man as man of our ancient culture. People accepted the distinctions of caste without question or criticism as something that had been ordained by Nature herself, like the physical or physiological distinctions in the vegetable or animal kingdom. There was no sense of superiority in the so-called higher castes nor any sense of degradation or inferiority in the so-called lower castes. This had been my experience in my boyhood and early youth. A new caste consciousness creating 'conflicts has however gradually developed, and this has revolutionised the ethics of the Hindu institution of caste by introducing the European class consciousness and class competition into our caste institutions. It was inevitable. Nor can we say that in the interests of our social evolution towards the highest modern ideal, this new development was not necessary and desirable. But still the unconscious manifestation of class pride in British society repelled me.

While my pulpit services brought me into contact with one class of British society, the most liberal and free-thinking class, with a broad outlook upon life and frankly appreciative of non-Christian peoples and civilisations, my work in connection with the temperance movement in Great Britain brought me into contact with another class of British society. They were mostly non-conformists, liberal in their politics but narrow and conservative in their religious life and social outlook. They had no appreciation of alien cultures and civilisations. The temperance movement, apart from its moral appeal, offered a convenient

ladder to the economically better sections of the lower classes of English society to bring themselves into some sort of social contact with their superiors. These people subscribed liberally to the funds of the Temperance Association, and were in many places prominent officials of the local organisations. It was particularly so in the smaller towns.

One particular experience of mine of this class of parvenu leaders of the British temperance movement has stuck to my memory all these years. I was invited to lecture at a temperance demonstration in a town in Yorkshire. My host was evidently one of the 'new wealthies' of the local society. He had a goodly sized house, fairly well-appointed, though the decorations and the furnishings gave more evidence of wealth than of refined taste. But I did not notice these at first. They attracted my eyes after I had been acquainted with the mind of my hostess. When we sat down to dinner, my hostess out of innocent and natural curiosity asked me if we in India used tables and chairs and forks and spoons like them at our meals. I replied, "No. We squatted on the floor or carpets or reed mats. each seat being separated from the other. We took our food as a rule out of banana leaves and used our fingers instead of forks and spoons." This provoked loud laughter from the company. My hostess calling her husband to hear the story, said, "Father, do you hear what Mr Pal says, how they take their meals in India. They sit on the floor, have their food on banana leaves and eat with their fingers." This was followed by a loud storm of laughter by the whole family. This put my back up; and after the laughter had subsided I quietly said, "But do you know the reason why; our people consider your ways as horribly unclean. The table linen you are using is not washed after every meal; the remnants of food that fall on it are only removed by a brush. This would not be considered sufficiently clean by my people. Then the spoons and forks that you use, can you be sure that they are scrupulously cleaned after every meal, and in every house? Your plates are dipped in hot water and then rubbed dry with napkin. We would not consider it sufficiently clean. But the banana leaves are thrown away after they have been used every time that we take our meal. Then we

squat on the floor, sitting on pieces of carpet or reed mat or polished wood. We have therefore saved the worry of counting our chairs before we can invite friends to our house. On festive occasions we have a company that counts even upto a thousand. You cannot entertain in your home more than twenty or thirty people, even that is a large number; and you have to arrange special functions where your guests exceed this number in some big restaurant or hotel. If you consider all these you will have to admit that our barbarism in this matter is more sanitary, cleaner and certainly much less costly than your civilisation." These remarks turned the laugh against them, and they never tried after this to pass any rash judgment upon the ways of my people.

But my hosts of the temperance movement in England were not all of this class. In some places I had the privilege of being entertained by the best educated and most refined members of the community. One of them was Bishop Freemantle, who was at that time the Dean of Ripon. He was one of the leading lights of the Broad Church Section of the Anglican Communion. When I went to keep a temperance engagement in Ripon, I was privileged to be his guest for the night. He took the chair at my meeting, and after the meeting he drove me to his home where I spent an interesting and profitable evening. Our conversation at dinner naturally turned on important theological subjects. In course of it I asked the dean if he knew that we had a doctrine of Trinity or something like Trinity in our Hinduism also. He said: "Yes, I know. They are Brahma, Vishnu and Siva." I said, "We don't call them Trinity, the more correct name for them is Triad. This triad is not really a philosophical concept. The real Hindu Trinity is found in our Vaishnavic thought, in the term *satchidananda*. *Sat* means existence or what may be rendered as The True in English. *Chit* means consciousness and *Anandam* means literally joy or, as an attribute of the Deity, Love. These however are not three persons, but only three aspects of the same Being or Unity. *Sat* is Brahman of the *Upanishads*; *chit* is Paramatman or the Indweller; *anandam* is that aspect of the Deity in which He reveals Himself as the Supreme Person entering into responsive relations with the human soul. Our Trinity is not

composed of three persons, but it is the realisation of the One and the Same Being from three standpoints. When we contemplate Him through our experiences of the outer world we realise Him as Brahman; when we contemplate Him through our inner experiences, we find Him as the witness who holds together our varied and passing sensations, sentiments and emotions, thereby establishing the unity of our inner self or individual consciousness; when however we approach Him through the relations of our inner consciousness with the world of outer nature and the social relations we have with other humans, we realise Him as the Lord; in our language we call Him *Bhagavan*. *Brahman*, *Paramatman* and *Bhagavan*—these are the three terms of our Vaishnavic Trinity. This Trinity is the basis and realisation of what you call Personal God. Brahman is the Father; Paramatman, to translate it in the terms of your Trinity, is the Holy Ghost, and Bhagavan is the Son; but with this difference that while in the conception of Christian Trinity the Father representing the Absolute or the Universal holds within Himself both the Holy Ghost and the Son, in our realisations it is Bhagavan, corresponding to the Son of the Christian Trinity, who holds together in Himself the other two—Brahman and Paramatman. In this Hindu conception Brahman is described as the effulgence of the body of Bhagavan and Paramatman as a part-manifestation of His Consciousness. Bhagavan is the Full and Complete Person; it is He who is the root and realisation of our rational, our volitional and our emotional life and experience." I fear I did not make the position of the Hindu Trinity as clear as I have tried to make it out here. I had myself at that time hardly any clear conception of it except what was conveyed by the familiar phrase. *Sat-Chit-Ananda*. But the very imperfect presentation of it which I was able to make to Dean Freemantle helped, I think, to make some impression on him regarding the transcendental experiences and speculations of the Hindu mind.

I inferred this from our conversations next morning over our breakfast. After breakfast the dean took me to his library and opening one of his own translations of the early Christian Fathers he pointed out to me a remarkable passage in which the author

(was it Tartulian?) made an appeal to his church in favour of adopting the Buddhist monastic disciplines which had been found so helpful in their endeavours after the higher spiritual and ethical life by the followers of Buddha. The suggestion was exceedingly flattering to my national culture and I asked myself if Christianity in the early centuries could take many things of high ethical and spiritual value from our Buddhistic realisations why should we not in this age be able to contribute from the larger and deeper experiences of our saints and savants to the broadening and deepening of contemporary Christian thought and piety. And I felt that here was a clear call to Bengal Vaishnavism, associated with Sree Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, to take up this world mission.

Mr Caine sometimes accompanied me and then we always put up in some first class hotel. One of my earliest temperance works, if not the very first, was in Glasgow. I think Mr. Caine accompanied me there. We put up at St. Enoch's Hotel. It was the anniversary of the National Temperance Society of Scotland. Scotland was then a great centre of the temperance movement. The meeting was held in the biggest public hall of Glasgow. I just now forget the name of it. It was crowded by an audience of nearly three thousand, men and women, gathered from all parts of Scotland, who packed the hall "from floor to ceiling" as a Glasgow paper put it. And when I got up to speak, this audience gave me a rousing reception the like of which I never had in my life before. And after I had finished they not only cheered me for some minutes but somebody started the familiar English song: 'For he is a jolly good fellow', and the whole gathering standing stumped with the foot on the floor to keep time with the tune of this song. This was my first experience of Scottish hospitality, and I shall never forget it as long as I live. The platform was crowded by the city fathers and ex-city fathers of this historic Scottish town, and the body of the hall was filled by representatives of the public life of Scotland.

Later on, I was invited by the National Temperance Association of Scotland for more than a week's lecturing tour in and about Glasgow. My hosts did not know that I was not a Christian, and when they came to know of it, the warmth of their

welcome seemed somewhat to cool down. In Scotland Christian orthodoxy had a much stronger hold than in England, though even in England going about addressing temperance meetings I had some queer experiences. I was invited one day to a small place not very far from Oxford. The gentleman who came to receive me at the station introduced himself as one who had known my country. Asked what part of India he had been to, he replied, "Not India exactly, but East Africa". This reminded me of a familiar question which students from my district of Sylhet were sometimes asked by our brethren of Calcutta, namely, if we knew so and so from Chittagong. These people had no idea of the geography of Eastern Bengal and did not know that Sylhet and Chittagong were not exactly next door neighbours. This English friend similarly had no idea of the geography of what they called the East. Asia and Africa are both the Orient, and therefore in their mind they were classed practically as one. While we were walking to the house of my host, this gentleman said, "Of course you are a Christian". I replied, "No, I am not." This appeared to have surprised him. Evidently he could not imagine an Oriental who is not a Christian being invited to lecture on temperance to Christian audiences. His next remark was, "Have you read the Bible?" I replied, "I cannot say that I have read it, I cannot say that I have not read it." Evidently my answer was too deep for him, and he replied, "Why, the Bible is translated into every language. It must have been translated into your vernacular also." I said, "Yes, it has been translated into my vernacular, and we sometimes read this translation to enjoy how our language could be innocently murdered by these foreign translations." But he rejoined, "They were all very learned men." "I agree," I said, "only they did not know sufficiently well the language into which they were translating, having learnt it from grammarians and dictionary writers." He gave up the subject in hopeless confusion, but returned to his original question, "But you know English sufficiently well to be able to read the Bible." I said, "May be, but my people don't understand why they should specially read the Bible. They have their own religious books; and these books contain things of as real ethical or spiritual value as the Bible. In

fact, they believe that the ethical and spiritual treasures of their own books, the *Vedas*, for instance, and the ancient Hindu epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, and the other ancient records of their religious life and spiritual experiences contain much more valuable lessons than the Christian Bible." His next remark was, "But pride is not a great moral or spiritual virtue." I said, "Certainly not; the pride of the Hindus in their ancient scriptures any more than the pride of the Christians in their own books." After this he gave me up as a hopeless subject for mission propaganda. And we commenced to talk of the commonplaces of politics.

My temperance work brought me also into touch with another and a much higher class of people, both socially and culturally. It was in the larger demonstrations in cities like Birmingham, Manchester and Glasgow, not to mention London, that I met the real leaders of the movement. At one of these, I forget the name of the place, I had the privilege of standing on the same platform with Sir Wilfred Lawson, the distinguished Liberal M. P. and world-renowned temperance reformer. He was the greatest wit in the House of Commons of his day, and I had from his own lips at this meeting the story of nine stalwart British jurors (or was it Scottish) and the stolen pig. The evidence against the accused was as clear as it could possibly be. But the jury brought in a verdict of not-guilty. This verdict very much surprised the presiding judge; and meeting one of the jurors at some social function, the judge asked him, how was it that in the face of the clearest possible evidence of the guilt of the accused, they brought in a verdict of not-guilty. The juror scratched his head and a little ashamed of himself said "the truth is, we all had a slice of the pig".

I remember another temperance demonstration in the Exeter Hall in London, where I had the honour of occupying the same platform with Dadabhai Naoroji. I forget who presided over it. But the meeting was very crowded. I was the last speaker. I put in a strong plea for the introduction of local option in my country. My last appeal was: "If you cannot let us govern ourselves as you do in your own country, for God's sake give us the right to protect ourselves from an evil from which you yourselves are suffering so

seriously." This appeal brought the whole house to its legs and as I sat down, immediately the audience commenced to clap for some minutes. I did not know then that it meant a call to me to stand up and receive their ovation. Dadabhai Naoroji, who was sitting next to me, at this asked me to get up and acknowledge their cheer, which I did; and then the meeting dispersed.

My scholarship was tenable for two years in the Manchester New College at Oxford; but I decided to give it up at the end of the first year, because I felt that to continue it for another year would mean waste of a £100 to the Unitarian Association, and 12 months of my own time, which I could better spend in the propaganda of the Brahmo Samaj and on behalf generally of the higher culture of my people, and the more practical problem of national autonomy or self-government in India. Though during the first year of my stay in England, I had some opportunity of presenting the ideals of the Brahmo Samaj to Unitarian congregations, I had little opportunity of doing any political work for my country, except in a very indirect way, from the platform of the temperance organisations. Before deciding however to resign my scholarship, I wrote to the Vice-Principal Dr. Carpenter, explaining the reasons that led me to think of it. I did not write to the principal, because my relations with him were practically official while my relations with Dr. Carpenter were of a more personal nature. He fully appreciated my reasons and in reply told me that I was right in thinking that I had already made myself acquainted in a general way with the methods and principles of scriptural interpretation familiar to modern European scholars. As regards details of the application of this principle to different scriptures, that would take not one or two years but practically a whole lifetime. Besides, so far as my work in connection with the Brahmo Samaj was concerned, these studies would hardly be of any practical help to me. Dr. Carpenter indeed was generous enough to go still further, and told me that I would certainly be more helpful to the Unitarian congregations by presenting our view of God and man in the light of the higher spiritual experiences of our race than I would profit myself by continuing for another year in his college. Thus encouraged, I sent in my

resignation which was accepted and I found myself free for propaganda work in England from June, 1899.

During my stay in Oxford, though not exactly in the university, I had some opportunity of coming into contact with the cultural life of that ancient British seat of learning through some of its learned societies. We had a Philosophical Club in the Manchester College called after Dr. Martineau. Professors of philosophy of the other Oxford colleges were members of it, and they used to attend the meetings of this club more or less regularly. One of these meetings towards the close of my first session in the Manchester College was held, if I remember aright, at Christ College, and was fairly well attended by professors and students of the university. The subject of the paper, which was read, I think, by one of the professors of moral philosophy, was the 'Ethics of Forgiveness'. I must say that both the paper and the discussion which followed were exceedingly disappointing. Nobody cared to go to the root of the subject. I was asked by the president, I think at the suggestion of Dr. Carpenter, to say something from the Indian or Hindu point of view. In response to this call, I said that the ethics of forgiveness could not be separated from the ethics of punishment. If punishment was retributive, then there was no place for forgiveness, strictly speaking, in the scheme of retributive justice. At one time we were very much exercised over reconciling God's justice with His mercy or love. That had been an old problem in Christian ethics. This problem had been sought to be solved by Christianity through the dogma of atonement or, more correctly, vicarious atonement, of Christ. Christ took upon himself the punishment of man for his transgressions, and by so doing he saved man from the wrath of divine justice. But if punishment were not retributive but only remedial then we had a clear view of the ethics of forgiveness. In other words, forgiveness was right and justified only when it helped to remedy the wrong committed. When Jesus said, "if a man smites thee on thy left cheek turn to him thy right cheek also," he went to the very root of this ethics of forgiveness. What is the wrong committed by the man who smites me? What is the divine law of brotherly love that ought to rule the relations between

man and man. If I try to get him punished by law, or if I punish him myself, do I really help to re-establish the law of brotherly love; or, on the contrary, by provoking a spirit of revenge in my assailant, contribute to break that law further? There can be only one answer to this question: by punishing the offender I do not help to restore the moral relation which he has broken, but further prevent its restoration. The ethics of forgiveness therefore is in this and similar cases the law of non-resistance preached by Jesus. But when the wrong done is not a personal wrong but a grave public wrong, the punishment of which involves no personal feeling and therefore may not necessarily provoke any personal enmity in the offender against the person who punishes him or secures his punishment, there not forgiveness but punishment is the moral duty. Non-resistance or positively loving forgiveness is the law in the case of all personal wrongs. Punishment is the law in all public wrongs. I tried to present this view but I did not feel sure that it commended itself to my audience.

England was then passing through a great war fever. Within a few weeks of my arrival in Oxford the Boer War broke out. In the first stages of that war, the British forces in the Transvaal met with repeated reverses. Every reverse sent up the temperature of the British public and the spirit of revenge stalked over the whole country. Publicists and politicians, as usual with them all the world over, were not slow to exploit these reverses and the feeling of revenge that took possession of the national mind like a vice, to advance their party into popular favour and strengthen their position in the National Parliament. It was in the height of this fever that, I think, the *Daily Mail* came into being. And it at once commenced to capture the public mind by its cry of revenge. The Boers must be crushed. The capitalists who had made their pile in the Rand or the diamond mines of South Africa had been scheming for years previously to get about this war. The notorious Jameson raid was specially staged for this purpose. But it failed to achieve what it had wanted. It left however its poison behind it both in the mind of the British and the Boer in South Africa. The British were not able to conquer their lust; the Boers were not able to get rid of the suspicion which that raid had naturally

created. This was the psychology of the Boer War in a nutshell. The early stages of that war was studied from day to day, if indeed not from hour to hour, from my lonely lodgings in London. I could not help sympathising with the two brave little republics that in their deathless love of freedom staked their all in this fight with a world-wide imperial power. The British, on their side, however made a very poor show. They had to requisition almost every postible military help from all their overseas possessions, they were not dominions as yet but only colonies, though the incidents of the Boer War were slowly and silently laying the foundations of this new development in the imperial policy of Great Britain. There was a talk in the earlier stages of the war of indenting Indian sepoys to the South African front. But the mere mention of it provoked almost universal opposition all over Europe. The white races could not contemplate the use of non-white soldiers to fight a white enemy. Though the Indian sepoys could not be indented for fighting Great Britain's little war in the Boer land, all the British colonies sent their contingents to save the honour and prestige of the mother-country. All this quite naturally appealed to the inherited instincts of chivalry in the Indian mind. Frankly speaking, I enjoyed the open evidences of the straits into which our masters found themselves in their war with the Boer. Few Englishmen could muster sufficient courage to speak out against the iniquity of this war. Those who did dare were persecuted for their freedom of thought and conscience by their fellowmen. In December 1899, which marked one of the acutest stages of this war, I was in Scotland with Mr Caine. And I remember one evening when the news of the fall of a valiant Scotch general (I forget his name just now) was flashed through the wire, Mr Caine and myself were walking from a meeting to our hotel in Glasgow. Mr Caine never supported this war, but he was nontheless very much depressed by these reverses, and was for the greater part of the way walking in silence by my side. Suddenly he said: "Pal, we are a nation of Pharisees. We Liberals are opposed to this war. We have tried our best to condemn the iniquity of it. But all the same we *must* win this war. And when we have done it, and come back to power at the end of it, do you

think we shall reinstate the Boers in their old freedom ? No. We Liberals shall quietly pocket these two republics without any sign of contrition. We are a nation of Pharisees." This wayside talk revealed to me not only the character of British politics, but also the inner soul of the man with whom I was walking. The man stood head over shoulder ethically above the politician in my friend; it is so all the world over. The politicians in the present stage of our evolution are an undeveloped race, morally and spiritually.

I remember a meeting of the Historical Society of Oxford held at the Mansfield College. In the winter of 1898-99 the Principal of the Mansfield College, Dr. Fairbairn, had been on a visit to India, I think as a Barrow lecturer. On his return from India he delivered an address before this society on his Indian experiences. I was specially asked by Dr. Carpenter to go to this meeting. At the close of Dr. Fairbairn's address the president said that though the lecture was very interesting there was no one there except myself (naming me) who could say anything on the subject matter of it, and he invited me to speak. It was a very delicate position in which I found myself in consequence of this request. The meeting was full of the representatives of the learning, scholarship and culture of Oxford. I could claim none of these things. My acquaintance with even the culture of my own race and country was of the most perfunctory kind. Yet Dr. Fairbairn had so misrepresented certain aspects of Indian religions and philosophy that I found it impossible to allow these misrepresentations to go unchallenged. The central theme of Dr. Fairbairn's address was the authority of the *Vedas* as believed in by the Hindus. He had met some learned Pundits at Benares and other centres of Hindu culture, and had been told by them that the *Vedas* were not the work of any man. They were simultaneously revealed with creation itself. These books were therefore coeval with the beginning of this universe. Such a presentation of Vedic authority naturally seemed to men thoroughly acquainted with the modern interpretations and criticisms of their own scriptures as exceedingly peurile and primitive. And it inevitably dissipated every claim of Indian and

or the intellect or the logical faculty. From this the inevitable corollary is drawn that with regard to objects cognisable by the senses and verifiable by the inductions and deductions derived from sense-knowledge, the authority is not the scripture but the senses and logic only. Thiswise our ancients boldly settled the familiar European dispute between science and scripture. In regard to matters geographical, for instance, or geological, or historical, biological, or psychological, not scriptural but their respective branches of science were the supreme authority. This was however not the last word in scriptural interpretation of Hindu exegesis. There were many things in the old scriptures that could not be cognised by the senses or verified by formal logic. Were we to believe in them? The answer was, how were you concerned in these things? Why did you want Revelation? You stood in need of Revelation only to guide you in your endeavours after salvation or *moksha*. Therefore the last canon of Hindu exegesis was *Mokshapratipadakam Shastram*, that alone was scripture or Revelation which established the law of *moksha* or salvation; all else that were found in the Vedas were mere statements of objects, mentioned to adorn a tale or point to a moral; these had no scriptural authority. Nor was this all. There was still another canon, irresistibly established on the above. Salvation came, we read in our scriptures, only through direct realisation of the Absolute or Brahman. Whatever therefore treated of the Absolute and revealed the way to His direct realisation was the only authoritative scripture. This last canon led the Hindu thought in regard to scriptural authority and divine revelation to a universal plane. According to this canon not only the Vedas but even the non-Hindu scriptures, the *Talmud*, the *Avesta*, the Buddhistic *Tripitakas*, the *New Testament* of the Christians, the *Quran* of the Mahomedans and even the most modern and recent presentation of man's direct realisation of his God, could legitimately claim scriptural authority. The Hindu therefore believed in perpetual revelation. The source of divine revelation was not confined to the accepted scriptures of the world. The course of God's revelation to man was eternal and everlasting. It was not dried up even today. This was, I tried to point out, the

real truth about the Hindu position in regard to the *Vedas*. These were no new apologetics, no modern interpretation of our scriptural authority; they were as old as the *Vedas* themselves. The position of the *Vedas* as Revelation in Hindu thought could not therefore be so airily dismissed as Dr. Fairbairn had tried to make out on the authority of his Hindu Pundits. There were such Pundits to be found in every religious community who were absolutely innocent of the exegetical literature of their own scriptures. I did not believe, I said, that Christian scholars would tolerate any attempt on my part to pillory the meaning and value of Christian Revelation on the authority of men who believed in the verbal revelation of the Bible. But though tried to combat the opinion of Dr. Fairbairn in regard to our *Vedas*, I did not feel at all sure that I was able to make our position clear or convincing to the learned men who had assembled to hear Dr. Fairbairn's Indian experiences. They knew nothing of our theological literature and what was worse they cared less to try to understand it.

Resigning my scholarship I had to pay for my expenses in England as well as contribute something towards the expenses of my family in Calcutta, which was however not difficult because many Unitarian ministers took their annual holiday during the summer and I was invited to officiate for them. In Kendal I had thus regular engagements continually for nearly eight Sundays. They had asked me to stay in Kendal all these weeks. But I found it more convenient to go there for weekends only. I had also some mid-week engagements from the temperance organisations.

Mr W.S. Caine, who had been in the previous Liberal Government as, if I am correct, the First Lord of the Admiralty, had lost his seat when I went to England, but had not retired from politics, and was wooing, I think, his old constituency in Scotland, the Kilmarnock Burgh, near Glasgow. And he invited me for a series of lectures to his electors. He accompanied me to his constituency. We stayed in St. Enoch's Hotel in Glasgow; and from there attended the meetings that had been arranged in his constituency. I remember a visit to the Liberal Club in Glasgow to which Mr Caine took me. He was a member of this Club. We had our lunch here. After lunch Mr. Caine introduced me to the

people who had come to the club to take their lunch. They were a fairly good company, all leading Liberals in the neighbourhood of Glasgow, who had their business offices in the city. After lunch they came and sat around me in the drawing room of the club. The Scotch are a very religious people. Before Herbert Spencer and the Mills, the Scotch were the only English philosophers of any repute, to use an Irish bull. One of the company was introduced to me by his friends as "an atheist". He protested against this epithet, saying: "Well, Mr. Pal, they call me an atheist because I refuse to accept the life and teachings of a man who lived under very different conditions nineteen hundred years ago, as a guide to my life in the 20th century. I replied, "Why do you take it that the Christ whom Christendom worships today is really the Christ who lived in the first century of the Christian era. There are really two Christs, the Christ of the scriptures and the Christ of Christian consciousness. This last is the real Christ whom Christendom worships. And this Christ has grown in the consciousness of the Christian from age to age. The Christ of the 20th century is not therefore really the Christ of the first century." This remark of mine seemed to satisfy the orthodox among my audience, while the so-called atheist also found in this presentation of mine a rational compromise between his opinion and the faith of his friends.

When I had started for England Indian questions had been receiving some attention from the British press and the public. In 1898 Mr. Ananda Mohan Bose had gone to England to make a somewhat prolonged stay, in his old university, Cambridge, with his eldest son, and advantage was taken of his residence in England to enable him to do some political propaganda there. The Congress had already set up an agency of its own, the British Committee, for political propaganda in England. Mr Hume, Sir William Wedderburn, Mr William Digby, Mr Dadabhai Naoroji, who had practically settled in England, were among the members of it. Mr Romesh Chandra Dutt, who had retired from government service, was also a member of it. This committee utilised Mr Ananda Mohan Bose's temporary sojourn among them to organise some public meetings for him. Mr Bose's lectures on

India attracted considerable public attention. Even the *Times* could not refuse to notice them. When I was elected to the Manchester College scholarship, it was thought by my friends in the Congress that I might find time and opportunity to do some political propaganda for my country. Surendra Nath Banerjee was one of them. And he had raised some money for my expenses from among his political friends. I was therefore under an obligation of a kind to do some political work in England both in the press and on the platform. The earliest opportunity for it came almost immediately after I joined the Manchester College.

Within a few weeks of my joining the Manchester New College, Lord Curzon left for India to take charge of his viceroyalty. The English papers were full from day to day of reports of the proceedings of many farewell functions organised in his honour. I was moved to send two fairly long letters to the *Manchester Guardian* inviting our future viceroy's attention to the great problem which he would have to face and try to solve as the governor-general. These letters attracted some attention in England, and disturbed the dovecot of our Congress politicians in India because I had said that the Congress represented only the educated middle class and was not really the spokesman of the masses. The real problem before both the government and the educated middle class was which of them would be able to capture the goodwill of the teeming populations of the country because it was upon the support of these ignorant and stolid masses that the ultimate victory in the present political struggle in India would depend. My Congress friends did not like this frank confession that we, the English-educated middle class, were more or less almost as much out of intellectual and moral touch with the vast masses of our inarticulate countrymen as the government itself. The Congress had concerned itself more with the works of the administration that directly touched them and their class than with the vital problems that affected the masses. My letter was really an appeal to the Congress, on the one hand, to amend the methods of their propaganda and to the government, on the other, to pay greater attention than what they had been used to do to the physical, intellectual and moral needs of the masses. These letters seemed to have—to some extent, however slight it

might be—influenced the policy of Lord Curzon as the Indian Viceroy. Lord Curzon throughout his seven year viceroyalty in India tried persistently to put down the pretensions, as he believed them to be, of the English-educated classes in the country, on the one hand, and on the other, to win the goodwill of the toiling masses in every walk of life, whether in the ministerial services of the government or in the Indian army, or among the general populations of the country. I had also pointed out one of the potent causes of the growing discontent in India to the irritating behaviour of the British in India, both officials and non-officials, towards the people of the country. Though this charge was denied by the spokesmen of the European community in this country, Lord Curzon seemed evidently to have been convinced of the general truth of this statement. His lordship therefore, while openly unfriendly to the large demands of the Congress, was never indifferent to this matter, and whenever any cases of ill-treatment of Indians by their European fellow subjects in this country came to his knowledge, he took serious notice of it. When some years later Mr Ashutosh Choudhury visiting England during the anti-partition and Swadeshi agitation wrote to the *Times* a strong indictment of Lord Curzon's viceroyalty, the latter in his defence referred to an estimate of his regime published in the *New India*, my English weekly, wherein I had stated that while Lord Curzon tried to fight the English-educated politicians in India, he was always mindful of the sufferings of the masses and tried to bring relief to them. Looking back upon those two letters of mine published in the *Manchester Guardian* in the winter of 1898 they seemed to have presaged the policy which the new Nationalist Party formulated and tried to carry out during the exciting years of the beginning of the present century.

Towards the end of 1899 I received through Mr Caine an invitation from the National Temperance Association of New York to visit the States on a three months' lecturing engagements. They offered to pay all my expenses while in America, and £100 as my fee. I gladly accepted this offer; only reserved the week-ends for my work with the American Unitarians in connection with my Brahmo Samaj propaganda. This was agreed, and in February 1899 I sailed for New York from Liverpool.

Chapter 16

FIVE MONTHS IN THE 'STATES'



My steamer left Liverpool in the afternoon. But in February 4 o'clock in England is practically evening. After dinner we entered the British Channel from the Mersey and almost immediately after I went to my bed and fell asleep. At about midnight I woke to find that the ship was not moving. We were at anchor as I found next morning in the Queens Town Harbour, where she had to take the overnight mail from London. After lunch it sailed again and entered the high seas. The Atlantic is always more or less boisterous; in the winter it is particularly so. And I soon found myself in the throes of a sea-sickness, when that forced me to keep to my cabin, which meant practically to my bed, until I smelt American soil after passing the statue of Liberty at the mouth of the Hudson. One incident of my life on board the steamer deserves mention. In those days it used to take about a week to reach New York from Liverpool. About the middle of the week the steward of my cabin came with a present of fruits from a fellow passenger, a lady, who asked me to put my hand out so that she might be sure that I have received her gift. She sent me her gift with a friendly greeting to a countryman of Swami Vivekananda from an American who owed her spiritual illumination to him. This was the first direct evidence I had of Vivekananda's influence in America.

I had not as yet made his personal acquaintance. Before going to Paramhansa Ramkrishna Vivekananda had been in close association with the Brahmo Samaj. He was a regular attendant in our services in the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. I think

he was a member of the choir of the Samaj and his help in this connection was highly appreciated. But that was during the year when I was working as a school master in Sylhet and Bangalore. I did not know him personally when he crossed over to America to attend the Parliament of Religions at Chicago; and there he suddenly leapt into almost a world fame. Before his appearance on the platform of the Parliament of Religions in Chicago he was hardly known in his own country. His wonderful success as a powerful orator and defender of the religion of his people had immediately a remarkable repercussion in India lending a new force and inspiration to the infant national consciousness among us. This was practically our first foreign mission. The Brahmo Samaj had its foreign delegation and deputation first to the United Kingdom in the person of Keshub Chunder Sen, and next to both England and America through the Rev. Bhai Protap Chandra Mazumdar, Keshub's lieutenant. But Keshub's message was really the message of a reformed Unitarian Christianity. So also was the message which Protap Chandra Mazumdar delivered to his British and American audiences. Neither Keshub nor Protap Chandra were in intimate touch with the ancient thought and realisations of their own people. They were both the product of the new education and illumination which our British masters had brought to us. Keshub certainly impressed his British audiences by his inspired eloquence and his personal magnetism. Protap Chandra did not attain Keshub's level in either. Keshub had not been to America, and in America Protap Chandra was the first Indian preacher. He had a fine presence, so had Keshub, though of a different character. Protap Chandra was of a much stronger built than Keshub. His straight nose, large eyes, high cheekbones and flowing beard (Keshub was always shaven) gave him the appearance of a Jewish prophet. He had a wonderful capacity of word-painting. His diction was more florid than Keshub's. But his strongest point was his spiritual imagination. We find it in his *Oriental Christ*, and more particularly in his *Heart Beats* and *The Spirit of God*. These last two were American publications, and they secured for their author a place among the spiritual teachers of the world like Marcus Aunlius,

Thomas A. Kempis and St. Augustine. Protap Chandra, however, only helped to lift his audiences and readers to higher reaches of their own familiar thoughts and realisations. The essence of his teachings was essentially Christian. Vivekananda, however, captured American imagination by the force of his 'impudent' courage. Keshub and Protap had been more or less apologists in their reference to Hinduism. Hinduism, as they knew it, had no claims to either superior ethics or deep spirituality. It was all practically idolatry and polytheism and caste. This was in those days the universal judgement of Europe and America on the religion of the Hindus. Vivekananda first offered a challenge to this universal British and American estimate of his national religion. It took his American audiences by surprise. It offered a stupendous shock to their old conviction and prejudice. There was no hesitancy, no suspicion of apology, no attempt to explain away, not the least little trace of any inferiority complex in this bold challenge to civilised conceit in Vivekananda's message of Hinduism to the crowded galleries of the Parliament of Religions. Vivekananda did not assign any reason, did not argue his position but delivered his message with soul-compelling directness and simplicity, like the ancient seers and sages of our own country or the prophets of the Old Testament as truths that could not possibly be contested or controverted. This was the real secret of Vivekananda's success in the Parliament of Religions at Chicago. And this success had an inevitable repercussion in India lending a new strength to the Hindu religious revival in the country.

Vivekananda was himself at this time in America, though I did not meet him because he was living then far away from New York, which was my headquarters. But the intellectual and moral commotion which he had produced in the continent was unmistakable, the first evidence of which I had on board the Star Liner by which I crossed the Atlantic.

When I got up on the deck at New York harbour, the unknown friend who had sent me the plate of fruits during my sea-sickness came and introduced herself to me as a friend of Vivekananda, saying that Vivekananda had forged a spiritual bond between her and every countryman of his. Though my interpretation of

Hinduism was not identical with that of Vivekananda, and we differed very widely from each other in our estimates of India's mission to the modern world, this statement of my first American acquaintance did my heart good and helped me to appraise correctly the great work which Vivekananda had been doing for India in the American continent.

An episode of my landing in New York deserves record as evidence of an aspect of American mentality. America is aggressively proud of her society and administration. This helped me pass my luggage without trouble through the customs. I had a big box of books, mostly Sanskrit and Bengali, besides my wearing apparel, that was my only heavy luggage. And I was asked to pay the customary duty on it. I protested because these books were not meant for sale but for my personal use only. They were old books. But the customs officer shook his head and said, "Old or new, duty must be paid on it, that is the law." I turned round and said, "Alright, if I must pay I must; but I thought America was a civilised and cultured country; I am disillusioned, because it is unthinkable that the government of a civilised and cultured people would tax the intellectual instruments of a public lecturer visiting their shores on an intellectual and moral mission." At this the customs officer at once passed my luggage without asking for any duty.

The National Temperance Association of New York had undertaken to arrange for my hospitality during my tour in the States, on temperance work. At New York they had engaged a room for me in a family hotel in West 39th Street. New York is divided into two sections, east and west, by a central avenue, called the Madison Avenue. This avenue is the only street in New York bearing the name of one of its prominent citizens. All the streets are designated by mere number. This struck me as an evidence of the uncompromising democratic mind of America. When I visited the States, American society was passing through a transformation. These family hotels were a sign of it. In these hotels people lived with their families, taking a suite of rooms and freeing themselves from the worries of the usual domestic life, engaging their own servants and doing their own shopping

and having their own tables. All these were transferred to the management of the hotel, where they could entertain their guests by paying extra for it. The privacy of the family life was secured by the isolation of their suite of living rooms. In all other matters they lived a common life. The advantage of these family hotels was that they found ample leisure to the housewives of the upper middle class families for the pursuit of their hobbies or the culture of their intellect or art sense. The unnatural aloofness in which the Englishman and the Englishwoman holds himself or herself in the hotels and lodging houses in London was very agreeably absent in New York. In my London apartments I had lived for months together without exchanging a single word with my co-lodgers whom I was constantly meeting in the stairs or the entrance hall. It was not so in America. My hotel in New York was fairly crowded when I arrived. But within 24 hours I found myself in fair terms of familiarity with most of my co-lodgers.

My first acquaintance here was a gentleman who had been an inmate of this hotel for many years. As soon as I arrived the manager of the hotel asked me if I would like to go to my room first or meet a gentleman who had been waiting to see me from the time my steamer was signalled. Naturally, knowing that he must have left his business for three or four hours with this object, I asked the manager to immediately take me to him. He was waiting in the reading room of the hotel. As soon as I entered he got up and putting forward both his hands gave me a most cordial greeting, saying: "You come from a great country; Sir; you are a representative of a great nation, who are destined to be the teachers of the world." This enthusiastic greeting almost took my breath away. My first idea was that he must be a disciple of Vivekananda, a convert to our neo-Hinduism, of which Vivekananda was an apostle in America. I have an instinctive mistrust of the judgment of converts. But before long I discovered that this new friend of mine was not a disciple of Vivekananda, nor a convert to Hinduism; he was a loyal member of the American Presbyterian Church. In fact, when he found that I was lecturing on the religion of the Brahmo Samaj, criticising orthodox Christian doctrines and dogmas, he openly condemned my

propaganda, saying that my place was not in America but in my own country, where I must work for the emancipation of my people to qualify them for discharging their mission as teachers of the modern world. He told me that with a view to discharge this great mission, we people of India, must be able to "look civilised humanity horizontally into the face". The expression struck me as original. He explained himself by adding that the world would not receive its lessons, however true or lofty these might be, from a slave. Our first duty therefore was to work for the liberation of our country from the British yoke. Until we have achieved this, we had no business in America.

This gentleman had a romantic story in his life. He was unmarried, but was attached to a lady who had already passed the first flush of her youth and was quite middle-aged like himself. They had been attached to one another for a very long time, the lady herself earning her own living in New York. Both were living in the same hotel, tending one another during their lighter ailments, the lady looking after the comforts of her friend with the loyalty and tenderness of a devoted wife. They took their meals at the same table, and spent their leisure together in common studies or recreations. The gentleman was, I think, a stock-broker and the lady a school-teacher. Theirs was an example of platonic friendship, such as I had never come across in actual life. Their life in the hotel was an absolutely open life, and the breath of scandal never touched it. Their co-lodgers in the hotel only admired and enjoyed their romance.

My first day in America had another pleasant surprise for me. In the evening while going to dinner, I had some one calling me from behind: "Is this Mr. Pal from India?" I turned and saw a stately romanesque matron far advanced in age but still preserving the memories of her earlier beauty of form walking behind, leaning on the arms of a younger companion. She came up to me and extending her hand greeted me with great cordiality, saying that she had heard that I had come to this hotel and wanted to make my acquaintance and invited me to her table. Thus commenced a friendship the memories of which live green in my mind even today, after a lapse of more than thirty years. She

was more than 35 when I first met her, and must have long passed over to the other side, but she has not as yet passed out of my mind. Here also was a sad romantic story. Married at the age of 19 she lost her husband on the first day of her honeymoon. Her husband had gone out for a morning ride, and less than an hour later his dead body was brought on a door torn off from its hinges by kindly neighbours. His horse had shed shy and throwing him off on his head had killed him instantly. The blow crushed the young bride and within six months as a result of continuous weeping she lost her sight. Time heals every wound, however deep and heart-rending. Time helped also to dull the edge of her bereavement. The lady had to look out for her future; and in the hope of making herself useful in life she took her admission into an institution for the blind. I think for three years she lived there; and had the second romance of her life in her intimacy with a fellow student, who recovered his eyesight, and went back to his home in Palestine, with a promise soon to return and claim his blind fiancée. He never returned. He was a Jew, and his fiancée lived, I think, to the end of her day in the hope of his return, so firm was she in her faith in the man. Another idea possessed her mind. She believed evidently on the testimony of her sixth sense that her lover would come back to America, when the Government of the United States would introduce gold currency and the American 'green backs', the popular name of American paper currency, would be converted into yellow. And when he came he would come as a multimillionaire, a master of finance. In the meantime, even while she was in the institution for the blind she turned her hand to literature, trying to earn her living by her pen. Her first book was *Alice*, the story of the romance of a blind girl. With the publication of this short story, the history of her own life also came to be widely known; and the background of real romance which it supplied to her first work made it a fairly goodseller. Since then she had been living by her pen. Other stories followed, one of which was the story of her second romance. It was as an author of fair repute that she was living at that time in the family hotel where I met her in New York. She had a secretary and amanuensis, who was almost like

a daughter to her. These two made a small family; and I found a friendly welcome to their table in the hotel. As long as I was in this New York family hotel, I had my meals in their company, and they attended all my public functions in New York and its neighbourhood.

My first public function in the States was a reception organised by the National Temperance Association. There were welcome speeches to which I had, of course, to reply. It was a fairly well-attended meeting, which broke up after 9 p.m. As I came out of the hall, I found a group of men standing on the road. The Boer War was then going on, and was the talk of the whole world. Neither in England nor in America did I affect European dress, necktie and bowler or top hat, but went about in my coat and *choga* and a turban of yellow silk. This strange dress of mine became an object of wonder to the group of Americans on the street. Someone seeing me cried out, "Gee! Kruger!" But they did not cause any annoyance to me, though this simple incident gave birth to a legend of my first night's experience in the streets of New York. Mr Caine wrote to the Indian papers, the '*Amrita Bazar Patrika*' and another English daily published from Madras, of which he was at that time the London correspondent, that I had been mobbed in the streets of New York by a crowd of Yankees, who had followed me calling me 'Kruger'. As in England, so also in America, my temperance engagements did not bring me into contact with the really cultured sections of the community. The supporters of the temperance cause were mostly narrow-minded non-conformists. For the first few weeks I lived in New York, going to and fro for my temperance lectures in its neighbourhood.

The colour sense is very strong in the white population of the States. But only on one occasion in a neighbouring State of New York, New Jersey, was I molested by a group of Americans while walking from the station to the place of my hotel. Otherwise neither in my hotel nor in the streets of New York nor in any other town which I visited was I ever taken for either a Negro or a Mulatto, the only two classes of the American population who are socially untouchable like our *pariahs*. And my American friends

oftentimes assured me that it was impossible for any one to mistake me for either. Besides in the eastern states, the colour sense was much less keen than in the southern states, which had been the centre of the American Civil War over the Negro question. But even here the social cleavage between the white and the coloured was marked and also cruel. No Negro or Mulatto could be served in any public restaurant patronised by the white men. Neither in New York nor in Boston have I ever met a single Negro or a Mulatto in any eating place patronised by the white Americans. The Negroes were the attendants in all these places, but they could not entertain any Negro guest, whatever might be his position, culture or character. The Negroes had their own eating houses or restaurants, mostly situated in their quarter of the town. Like our Madras towns or villages where the Brahmins live apart from the *pariah* or *panchamya*, so also in the American cities the white population lived apart from the Negroes. When I went to Boston on a week's lecturing tour in the city and its neighbourhood I heard a pitiful story of a Negro of culture and position who had built at considerable expense a house in one of the suburbs of the city. My host was himself a resident of it. This suburb was then just growing, and he pointed out to me an empty house in front of his own which had been built by this Negro gentleman. He had moved to it with his family, but had found it impossible to live in it for more than a few months. None of neighbours would exchange a single word with him or his wife; even their children were shunned as social lepers by the children of their white neighbours. No man or woman can live in this social isolation in an atmosphere of unremitting and studied insult of their neighbours; and this Negro family had to remove from their house, and evidently as a punishment for their impudent social ambition no one was found either to rent or buy that house.

Travelling up and down the States, I never found a single Negro passenger in what might be called by us the upper classes of a railway carriage. In America there is only one class of railway carriage, corresponding to our third. But they have managed to get out of this democratic arrangement with the help of special parlour cars and sleeping cars. These parlour cars are not owned

by the railway companies, but belong to the Pullman Car Company, which by arrangement with the railway companies have their cars attached to the more important trains. The railways book only one class of passengers, but by securing seats or beds in the Pullman cars on payment of an extra, one may avail oneself of the luxuries of a Pullman car. For day journeys and short distances they run what are called parlour cars. They give you an easy chair, cushioned, and a small table, and provide an attendant who brings you from the dining car whatever you may want, drink or food. In these Pullman cars travelling up and down the States, during my five months sojourn there, I never met a single Negro or Mulatto passenger. So rigid was the social boycott of the Negroes and the Mulattoes by the white populations of the States that even those among the former who could pay for the extra fare did not care to use them.

I had one curious experience while travelling once from New York to Boston in a parlour car. Leaving New York immediately after breakfast, I had to take my lunch in this car and seeing in the menu 'pickled mangoes' my heart leapt with joy at the prospect of tasting mangoes, the favourite fruit of my country in that distant land. How great however was my disappointment when having called for this rare delicacy, I found, when it was brought to me, that it was not mango at all but pickled cucumber! The American dietary, I found, was somewhat different from the English menu. For one thing, the Americans take a lot of more vegetables than the English, and a much larger variety of dishes. The usual vegetables in England are cabbage, cauliflower and turnip with vegetable marrow in season and spinach. In America I found, in addition to these, stewed corn or maize as well as a very fine and small species of rice; these are really similar to what we know as *ragi* in southern India. All vegetables are served however always with a pat of butter.

In New York, besides the familiar fishes placed on the table in England, I found our own *hilsa*, the Americans call it *shad*, which has the same form and the same multiplicity of fine bones and the same flavour as our own favourite fish. The *hilsa* is not found in Madras or Bombay either; it is found however in

Sind in the Indus in its lower reaches. It is called by our Sindhi friends *balla* fish, and is considered by them a great delicacy. The American cookery is also richer than the English cookery. In fact, what we know as English cookery except roast beef or ham or mutton, is not English but really French as every menu in all high class English hotels would testify. The American cookery is richer and of a more varied character than that of the English.

As regards drinks, the Americans are not like the English great tea drinkers. They drink their tea not with milk nor steaming hot, but cold, frequently with slices of lemon. Another peculiar American habit is that they rarely or never drink plain water, but use ice in their water in the coldest season of the year. Ices also are found almost always with their dessert. Judging from my experience it seemed to me that the Americans do not consume as much strong drinks as the natives of Europe. It may be that my connection with the New York Temperance Association and my position as a temperance lecturer did not bring me into contact with the class of people who are used to alcoholic beverages.

The Americans are however great coffee drinkers. There were no tea-shops in New York, but one found decent coffee shops almost at every corner. And the American coffee with whipped cream is really something very delectable. These coffee shops, when I visited the States, were replacing the saloons rapidly, showing the progress of the teetotal habit among all classes of its populations.

Town planning in America was also something striking and very different from town planning in the Old World, with the possible exception perhaps of Paris. In the Old World the cities grew, while in America the cities were made. When cities grow under the pressure of their growing populations in response to the needs of their business they cannot be built on any plan. This is not so in regard to most of the bigger cities of America. In New York the whole city has been built somewhat like a chessboard intersected by the streets running from east to west and avenues driven from north to south. The result is that every house opens to a main street. At the back of it is the back of another house facing the next street. Coming to the front of your house you

see the hurry and bustle of city life. But going to the back verandah you find yourself in a quiet, almost rural scene, created by the back gardens of your own and neighbouring houses. This characteristic town planning has made its mark upon American idioms. They measure distances from one house to another in their cities by the term 'block'—three blocks away, four blocks away, etc. This has made it much easier for a stranger to find his way to his destination than it is in English cities. The streets in New York, as I said, are designated by numbers and are divided into two parts, east and west; and the houses are numbered not as is usually done in England or in our towns consecutively but the even numbers are found on one side of the street while the odd numbers are ranged on the other side. This certainly better plan has commenced to be copied in the Old World also. The most remarkable thing about American cities however is what are called their 'skyscrapers'. I found this specially in New York. When you run up your houses to the eighth storey and higher you must provide it with lifts. And though my hotel was built after the older pattern and was only three storey high with a garret making the fourth storey, and there was therefore no lift provided for us, in most of the other buildings in New York they had lifts. The mechanism of the lift had not as yet been perfected, and accidents were not very rare either. One particularly bad accident was reported in the papers while I was in New York. A lift in one of the skyscrapers suddenly broke down and was stuck with its passengers midway between one floor and another; and the unfortunate men and women spent an exceedingly bad hour confined in their lift until means were found to rescue them.

As regards the American mind, one thing that struck me most was its comparative freedom from the bondage of old ideas and traditions.. The American people seemed to me to have all the doors and windows of their soul absolutely open to God's free light and air. They are more receptive to new ideas than the conservative English men and English women. Except the one besetting prejudice against colour, the American people have no other prejudices and very few prepossessions. They are free also from the conceit of superior civilisation that is a very unattractive

feature of the general English character. On the whole, the Americans, particularly their women, are more devoted to intellectual pursuits than their cousins on the other side of the Atlantic. It did not take me long to discover this peculiar trait of the higher classes of American society. The men toiled from morning to evening to make money. And their womenfolk instead of spending their time in shopping or society small talks engaged themselves in the pursuit of literature and the fine arts. It is the women of America who keep up the cultural life of that continent.

One morning I saw a notice of a lecture by Professor Lenman, who held the chair of Sanskrit in the Harvard University, on the Sanskrit epics *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Admission was by tickets, one dollar each. I was impelled by my natural curiosity to go to this lecture. It was held in one of the public halls of New York. I forget its name now. And what was my surprise to find an audience of about 250 ladies gathered there to hear this lecture. The only gentlemen, besides Professor Lenman, were myself and just two isolated Americans. When I went in I was showed to a front seat in, what might be called in the language of the stage, orchestra stall. As soon as I had taken my seat, a messenger came to me and asked me to go to one of the boxes where a lady would like to speak to me. I discovered that I owed this honour to my dress which indicated that I was an Indian. She was keenly interested in Indian studies, and had attended Vivekananda's Vedanta classes. At the end of Professor Lenman's lecture, questions were invited, as is usual in functions of this kind in the States. And these questions showed that the ladies who attended this lecture were seriously interested in its subject-matter and followed it with intelligence and understanding. I was also urged to speak a few words which I did. This brought me many introductions from the ladies present leading to a general invitation to the most important ladies club in New York, the Bernard Club.

INDEX



- Absolute or Brahman
 - ways of knowledge, 333-335
- Acharya, Peary Mohan, 272
- Ackroyd, Miss, 286
- Act of Parliament, 436
- Act II of 1877, 228
- Act XIII of 1859, 414
- Adhyatma Ramayana, 14
- Adi Brahmo Samaj, 194, 196,
 - 253, 261, 273, 418, 422
- Advaita, 98
- Afghanistan war
 - and Russia, 205, 302
- Agasti, Surya Kumar, 177
- Agnihotri, Pandit Sivinarayan,
 - 396
- ahinsa, 505
- Ahmed, Sir Syed, 410-411, 433
- akhara, 82-84
- Ali, Aher, 203
- Ali, Justice Ameer, 315
- Ali, Shaukat, 496
- All-India Civil Service
 - agitation, 363-364
- All-India Congress Committee,
 - 405
- Allahabad Association, 220
- Alochana*, the monthly journal,
 - 393
- American civil war over the
 - Negro issue, 547
- Amrita Bazar Patrika*, The 117,
 - 183, 203-204
- Anderson, 111
- Anglo-Indian Temperance
 - Association, 515
- Annesty, 203
- Arms Act, 198, 224, 238, 407
- Arya Samaj
 - contribution and movement
 - in Punjab, 93, 367-370, 373,
 - 396, 429-432
- Asha*, weekly magazine, 459
- Assam
 - backward movement, 134
- Assam Cooly Act, 415
- astrology or astrologer
 - father's belief, 96, 344
- Aurilius Marcus, 540-541
- Bahadur, Maharaja Sir
 - Narendra, 361
- Bahadur, Raja Harendra
 - Krishna, 200
- Bai, Dhankar, 300-301
- Banagadarshan*, The (1873-74)
 - starting, 169
- Bangabasee, The 325, 389
- Banerjee, Surendra Nath, 110-
 - 112-113, 115, 117, 171-172,
 - 177-184, 186, 188, 193, 199-

- 201, 208-209, 220, 239, 243,
262, 309, 317, 353-354, 363,
365, 390-391, 394, 403, 537
imprisonment, 326-327
public protest, 360-361
trial and dismissal from ICS,
359-360
- Banerjee, Bhairab Chander,
223, 273
- Banerjee, Captain, 199
- Banerjee, Chandi Charan, 299
- Banerjee, Dr Durga Charan,
173
- Banerjee, Dr Gurudas, 332
- Banerjee, Dr K.M., 169, 220, 330
- Banerjee, Hem Chandra, 169,
171, 188, 192
- Banerjee, Indra Nath, 325
- Banerjee, Jitendra Nath, 200
- Banerjee, Kali Charan, 23-24,
392, 412-413
- Banerjee, Mrs (Sashipada), 516
- Banerjee, Mrs (Surendra Nath),
111
- Banerjee, Raj Krishna, 169
- Banerjee, Ram Chandra, 396,
399
- Banerjee, Sashipada, 515
- Banerjee, Yogesh Chandra, 167
- Bangalore Brahmo Samaj, 292
- Bangla Mahila Vidayalya, 481
- Barbara, Emmi, 234
- Basu, Amulya Charan, 160
- Basu, Bhupendra Nath, 160
- Basu, Chandra Nath, 169
- Basu, Durgakumar, 24, 27, 131
- Basu, Durga Kishore, 30
- Basu, Jogendra Chandra, 394
- Bea Consfield, Lord, 204-207,
302
- Bellet, 154-157
- Bengal Administration Report,
218
- Bengal Educational Service, 21
- Bengal land or rent law
amendment, 317
- Bengal People's Association,
220
- Bengal Political Movement,
327-328
- Bengal Provincial Conference,
448-450
- Bengal public opinion, 262, 317,
326, 395
- Bengal Rent Bill, 317
- Bengal Tenancy Act, 312
- Bengalee journalism, 262, 324
- Bengalee Kayesthas, 15
- Bengalee literature, 130
renaissance, 193
role, 204, 376
- Bengalee renaissance, 169
- Bengalee theatre,
role, 146-147, 180, 187, 189,
228-229, 323
- Bengali drawing
role, 190
- Bengali medium use, 197
- Bengali poetry, 170, 190
- Bengali press, 189, 203
- Bengali stage
Neela Darpan first political
drama, 187-189
role, 187-188, 204, 228
- Bethune Society, 448
- Bette, 167
- Beveridge, 286, 447-449

- Bhadrалоks, 86
 Bhagavad Geeta, The, 15, 56,
 377, 478, 479
 Bhairab
 centre of industry, 143
 Bhajanghata Indian
 Association, 220
 Bhajekar, 301
 Bhakivada schools, 321
 Bhakti cult, 497
 Bhakti message, 483
 Bhakti movement, 470
 Bharat Ashram, 226
Bharat-Mihir, The, 211, 281, 336,
 389
Bharat-Sankaraka, The, 324
 Bharat Som Askarak, The, 262
 Bharata Ashrama
 breaking, 295
 Bipin
 meaning, 248
 Bismarck, Prince, 205
 Blavatsky, Madame, 319, 371,
 373, 406
 boat
 means of communication,
 72-73, 81
 Boer War, 529-530
 Bombay Agriculture Relief Act,
 311
 Bombay Association, 220
 Bombay Presidency
 Association, 353
 Bonnerjee, W.C., 390, 403, 412
 Bose, Amritlal, 252, 292
 Bose, Ananda Mohan, 150, 152,
 171, 173-174, 186-188, 193,
 220, 222, 258, 261, 263, 317,
 326-327, 365, 390-391, 394,
 458, 480, 536,
 Bose, Bipin Behari, 299
 Bose, Chandra Nath, 325, 400
 Bose, Girish Chandra, 179, 273
 Bose, Jogendra Chandra, 324
 Bose, Mahendra Nath, 447
 Bose, Miss Achala (Jagdish
 Chandra Bose), 304, 323
 Bose, Miss Mona, 397
 Bose, Nanda Krishna, 178
 Bose, Rajnarain, 169-170, 180,
 194-198, 324, 376, 422
 Bose, Sir Jagdish, 304
 Bose, Umesh Chandra, 338
 Boycott Movement, 392
 Bradlaugh, Charles, 434-438
 Brahminism, 102
 revival, 51
 Brahmo
 Hindu community
 opposition, 253
 Brahmo Marriage Act, 253-254
 Brahmo Marriage Bill, 196-197
Brahmo Public Opinion, The, 261,
 317-319
 Brahmo Samaj, 24, 93, 101-102,
 150, 167, 174, 176, 182, 188,
 201, 246, 248-249, 252-253,
 258, 277, 292-293, 295-296,
 299, 318, 322, 333, 353, 362,
 367, 371-375, 394, 403, 418-
 421, 439, 453-461, 462-466,
 469, 539
 anniversary, 442, 499
 criticism, 176-177, 233
 description, 225-245
 followers, 226

- ideas and practices, 227, 229, 236, 377-378
- members, 226, 241
- movement, 169, 273, 282-284
- social and religious
 - movement, 282-284, 320-332, 337, 339, 354, 480-482
- propaganda, 241-242, 320-322, 527
- revival, 319
- setback, 226
- Theism, 517
- spritual and freedom, 353
- theology, 230-231
- Brahmo Niketan, 225, 227, 252
- Brahmo Samaj Committee, 258
- Brahmo Students' Home, 225, 227
- Branson, 310
- Bratya Kshatriyas, 15
- Bright, John, 365, 434
- British bureaucracy, 116
- British and Foreign Unitarian Association, 507, 514, 517
- British Indian Association, 299, 330, 353
- British society
 - classes, 520-521
- British Temperance Association, 515-516, 521
- British Temperance Movement, 522-523
- Buddhism
 - Bengal stronghold, 351-352
 - conversion, 352
- Bux, Mowla, 213
- Caikwad, 221
- Caine, W.S., 511-512, 515-517, 524, 530, 535, 538, 546
- Calcutta High Court
 - eminence, 149-150
- Calcutta Mess, 147, 148
- Calcutta Public Library or Metcalfe Hall
 - importance, 446-447, 453-454
- Calcutta Students' Association, 174, 178, 180,
 - establishment, 171-172
- Calcutta University, 22, 24
 - dominating role, 417
 - students production, 151
- Campbell, Sir George, 42, 115, 117, 134, 153-154, 172-173, 198, 221, 263, 512
- car festival or *ratha-yatra*, 55-58
- Carey, 23
- Carbonari, 183-184
- Carpenter, Dr Estling, 512-513, 527-528
- Carpenter, Miss, 512
- caste and social honour, 86
- caste and social life, 78-79
- Cawnpore Association, 220
- Central Asia
 - Russian objective, 204-205
- Chakravarty, Byomkesh, 178-179
- Chanakya, 8, 10, 16
- Chandravarkar, Justice, 300-301
- Channing, Flery William, 453
- Chatterjee, Amarendra Nath, 447, 449
- Chatterjee, Bankim Chandra, 130, 169-170, 182, 320-323, 331, 376-377
- Chatterjee, Bhutnath, 160
- Chatterjee, Nabakanta, 394

- Chatterjee, Nishikanta, 394
 Chatterjee, Pankaj Kumar, 160
 Chatterjee, Pratul Chandra, 394, 396, 398-399
 Chatterjee, Taraprasad, 169
 Chattopadhyaya, Dr Aghore Nath, 332
 Chaudhuri, Radha Nath, 279-282, 290
 Chaudhury, Raj Chandra, 265, 275, 278-282, 288
 Chaudhary, Tara Kishore, 149-150, 153, 241, 243-245
 cholera, 77, 136
 Choudhury Ashutosh, 538
 Christ, Jesus, 234, 462, 466, New Testament, 196
 Christian missionaries, 375-376
 Christian orthodoxy, 184-196
 Christianity, 321
 Chunder, Gonesh Chander, 223
 Civil Marriage Act of 1872, 239, 252-254, 286, 295
 Civil Service Regulation, 365
 Clarke, Dr C.B., 139
 College Street, 152
 Colvin, Sir Auckland, 407, 411-413
 Commonwealth of Nations, 316
 Comte, 175
 Connemare, Lord, 407
 Consent Bill, agitation, 449-451 passing, 452
 conversion from Buddhism, 352
 Cooch Behar marriage issue, 152, 244, 252-258, 261, 482
 Corital Association, 220
 Cornwallis, 311-312
 Cotton, Sir Henry, 448, 508-509
 Cousin, Victor, 378
 Coysh, Mrs, 517
 Crimean War, 204-205
 Curzon, Lord, 538
 Dacca People's Association, 220
 Dalhousie, Lord, 204
 Daniel, 326
 Das, Ananda Mohan, 260
 Das, Bhuvan Mohan, 261, 318
 Das, Bipin Behari, 282-287
 Das, C.R., 295
 Das, Dr Sundari Mohan, 101-102, 132, 138, 145, 148, 150, 166, 175, 241, 242, 245, 342-344, 441-445
 Das, Durga Mohan, 251, 258, 261-262, 286, 295, 317-318, 337, 339-340, 383, 480-481
 Das, Manmohan, 144
 Das, Peary Charan, 280-281
 Das, Peary Mohan, 231-232
 Das, Sir Nath, 189
 Das, Upendra Nath, 189
 Dastidar, Daramani, 51
 Datta, Akshay Kumar, 26, 130, 169, 378, 419, 422
 Datta, Haridas, 228
 Datta Kalinath, 262, 484
 Datta, Krishna Lal, 160
 Datta, Parvati Nath, 160
 Datta, Sashi Bhusan, 150, 273
 Datta, Sitanath, 101, 252, 257, 339
 Datta, Srinath, 101, 150, 252

- Datta, Umesh Chandra, 117,
 262-263, 324, 484
 De, Harinath, 510
 Deb, Kailasa Chandra, 113
 Dev, Raja Narendra Krishna,
 447
 Dev Samaj, 396
 Dev, Shib Chandra, 339
 Dev, Sir Radhakanta, 222
 Devendranath, Maharshi, 458,
 499
 Digby, William, 536
 Divine Service, 226
 Dol-Yatra festival, 83
 Duff, Alexander, 221-22
 Duff, Dr, 23, 152, 159-160
 Dufferin, Lord, 406, 433-434,
 456
 Dummond, Dr, 412
 Durga Puja or Goddess
 Worship ceremony, 17, 64,
 70-71, 77, 83, 89-95, 98
 Dutt, Jogesh Chandra, 223
 Dutt, Mrs, 397
 Dutt, Romesh Chandra, 309,
 358, 536
 Dutt, S.K., 397
 Dutta, Dwijadas, 179
 Dyson, Dr, 176

 East India Company, 172, 204,
 349-250
 Eden, 212, 214, 216
 education
 Arya Samaj role, 431-432
 Education Gazette, 233
 Education Policy or Woods
 Education Dispatch of
 1854, 22-23, 115-116, 172-
 173, 198, 263, 358

 Edward, Albert, 189
 Edward VII, King
 Calcutta visit, 166-167
 England
 general elections in 1888, 302
 radical means, 302-312
 English education in Bengal,
 153, 172, 195, 221, 350, 371
 history, 23
 impact, 80
 introduction, 186
 spread, 357-358
 English schools and colleges in
 Bengal, 17, 25, 378
 Everson, 453, 506

 Fairbairn, Dr, 531, 533, 535
 Fakirchand, 344-345
 Fayre, Col, 203
 Federation of Free
 States, 316
 female education, 122-123, 173,
 296, 480
 Lushington investigation,
 123-124
 Sircar's role, 158
 female emancipation, 480
 female normal school, 481
 Fenuah Case, 209-210
 Fibit, 176
 foreign products
 condemnation, 197
 Fox's book of Christian
 Missionaries, 259
 Freedom Movement
 Arya Samaj role, 367
 Bengal's role, 352, 365, 422
 pioneers, 117
 French Revolution, 177, 190

- Gadadhar, 113-114
 Gad-Mandaran, 170
 Gaikwad trial, 203
 Ganguly, Dwaraka Nath, 152,
 324, 325, 403, 414
 Gayatree, 269
 Ghosh, Ananda Mohan, 319,
 481
 Ghosh, Chander Madhab, 223
 Ghosh, Ganesh Chandra, 261
 Ghosh, Jadumani, 264-266
 Ghosh, Lal Mohan, 310-311,
 364, 367
 Ghosh, Manohar, 232
 Ghosh, Nagendra Nath, 317,
 392
 Ghosh, Sir Rash Behary, 223,
 243
 Ghosh, Sishir Kumar, 182
 girl schools in Bengal, 123, 158
 Gladstone, 302-303, 308
 gods and goddesses, 355
 Gordon, Col, 308
 Gostha Leela, 58-59
 Goswami, Pandit Bijaykrishna,
 62-63, 123, 187, 260, 461,
 480, 509
 and Brahmo Samaj, 483-496
 association with the Brahmo
 Samaj, 464
 Bhakti Movement, 476
 discard of Brahminical
 thread, 475-476, 494-495,
 497
 ethical spiritual culture,
 499-500
 Goswamis in Bengal, 270-271
 Karta Bhajas, 486-489
 Kumbha mela visit, 493-495,
 497
 new life to Brahmo Samaj,
 474-475
 personality and character,
 490-491, 498-499
 resigns from the ministry of
 Brahmo Samaj, 491
 resigns his connection with
 Sadharan Brahmo Samaj,
 500
 Sikh sadhu guru, 492
 Govindjee, 301
 Griffin, Lord, 487
 Grubb, 511
 Guha, Anath Bandhu, 211, 281
 Gunda Mal, 401
 Gupta, Aghorenath, 483
 Gupta, Beharee Lal, 117, 309,
 358
 Gupta, Ganga Govinda, 161,
 216
 Gupta, Sir Krishna Govinda,
 151-152, 161
- Hafez**
 Persian poet, 470
 Halder, Baroda Nath, 295
 Halder, S.N., 295
 Hamilton, William, 378, 418
 Hand, 154, 156
 Hare, David, 23
 Hari Sabhas, 322
 Harwood, 508
 Heenan, 215-216
 Herbert, Captain, 508
 Hindu
 division, 48
 Hindu caste of Bengal
 evolution, 48

- Hindu College (1820), 158, 172, 420
Hindu Hitavshinee, The, 217
 Hindu mela, 194, 198
 Hindu-Muslim
 fight in Bengal, 351-352
 Hindu religious movement
 revival, 320
 Home, Gagan Chandra, 241, 324
 hotels, 143
 Hume, A.O., 175, 315, 390-391, 402-410, 433-434, 536
 Hume-Colvin
 controversy, 411-412
- Id festival
 Hindu-Muslim celebration, 68, 81
- Ilbert Bill
 controversy, 308-310, 313, 326, 378-382
- Ilbert, Sir C.P., 309
- Indian Association (1876)
 objectives, 354
 role, 178, 219-220, 327, 353-354, 360-363, 391, 414
- Indian Civil Service
 Bengal's role, 117, 358-359
 first Indian selection, 110
 see Banerjee, Surendra Nath
 lowering the age, 178
 Surendra Nath's position, 172
- Indian Messenger, The*, 319
Indian Mirror, The, English Organ, 261, 456
- Indian National Congress
 Allahabad session, 410, 433
 birth, 316
 Bombay session, 330, 390-392, 407, 442
 Calcutta session, 330, 390-392, 407,
 Indian Social Reform Association, 262
 indigenous clothes
 encouragement, 197
 indigenous education of the people of Bengal survey, 123
 Indus-Prakas, the bi-lingual weekly, 300
 inter-caste marriages, 51-52, 196, 253, 356
- Islam
 monotheism, 88-89
- Issac, Sir Rufus, 518
- Iyer, Gopalaswamy, 292-293, 297
- Iyer, G. Subramanyam, 438
- Jala, Shah, 66
- Jaykrishna, 113
- Jhoolan or Swinging Festival, 52-53, 60, 83
- Joshi, Nam, 404
- Jubilee Year of Queen Victoria's reign, 1887, 393
- Kali Dr Chandra Sekhar, 145
- Kali, Nritya
 author's first wife, 341
 romantic story, 298-299
- Kar, Ramkrishna, 6
- Karts Bhajas
 new sect of Bengal
 Vaisuravas, 484-489

- Kashiram, Lala, 401
 Kathia Baba
 Vaishnava saint, 244
 Kempis, Thomas, A, 541
keertans, 83-84, 93, 186-187
 Khan, Amir, 202
 Khanna, Jagannath, 223
 kite flying, 60
 Knight, Mrs, 130
 Kripa (author's sister), 121-122, 131
 Kumbha Mela Allahabad, 1893, 493-495, 497, 500

 Lal, Rai Bahadur Kanayaha, 397
 Lamb, Major, 118
 Latiff, Nawab Abdul, 315
 Law Courts
 establishment, 350
 Lawrence, Sir John, 266
 Lawson, Sir Wilfred, 526
 Lee, 447, 455
 Leitner, Dr, 417
 Lenman, Prof, 551
 Local Self Government Act, 311-314
 Lushington, 123-124
 Luther, Martin, 426
 Lytton, Lord, 203-204, 280, 302-303

 Macanlay, Lord, 313, 358
 Macarthy, John, 393
 M'Cosh, 176
 Macdonald, Dr K.S., 222-223
 Mackerith, 112
 Madhudas, Mrs, 301
 Madhoram, Lala, 401
 Madhusudan, Michael, 170
 Madras, 293
 Madras Mahajan Sabha, 373
Mahabharata, the 526
 Mahalanobis, Guru Charan, 501
Mahanirvana Tantra, 478
Mahantrovana Tantra, 419
 Mahaprabhu, Shree Chaitanya, 52-54, 57, 61-62, 82, 98, 182, 187, 268, 470, 478, 493-494, 524
 movement, 181, 187, 268-270
 renunciation, 61
 Mahomedan Educational Conference, 410
 Maine, Sir Henry Summer, 253, 352
 Maitra, Heramba Chandra, 160, 336
 Majithia Sardar Dayal Singh, 394, 398, 399
 Majoomdar, Pratap Chandra, 257
 Majumdar, Abinash Chandra, 396, 399-401
 Malcolm, 180
 Manipuri
 cleanest, 54-55
 dress, 56
 economic conditions, 56
 festivals, 54-57
 marriage customs, 54
 origin, 53-54
 professions, 54
 Manipuri women
 non-observance of *zenana* seculsion, 54
 Manu, 15, 82, 270
 Marchent, 517
 Marchent, Mrs, 517

- Marriage Age, 239
 agitation, 449
 Marshman, 23
 Martinean, Dr Harriet, 445, 528
 Mayo, Lord, 202-204
 Mazumdar, Bhai Pratap
 Chandra, 540-541
 Mazzini, Joseph, 182-184
 Metcalfe, Sir Charles, 446
 Metropolitan Institution,
 Calcutta, 243
 object, 173
 Mian, Titu, 109
 Miller, George, 498
 Mills, J.S., 536
 Milton, 235
 study, 159
 Mitra, Ananda Chandra, 241-
 242
 Mitra, Dinabhandu, 235
 Mitra, Dr Rajendra Lal, 391
 Mitra, Gopi Krishna, 446-447
 Mitra, Krishna Kumar, 257, 336,
 338
 Mitra, Nabagopal, 194, 197-198,
 223
 Mitra, Pyari Chand, 446
 Mitra, Sardar Charan, 187
 Mitra, Tralokya Nath, 403
 Mohan, Bhuban, 319
 Mohan, Hari, 140, 144
 Moharam
 popularity, 66-68
 money circulation
 example of lower caste rich
 family, 86-87
 Montague-Chelmsford Report,
 314
 Montrion, 119
 Mookherjea, Shambu Chandra,
 108-109
 Mookherjee, Pyari Mohan, 449-
 450
 Moslem movement, 411
 Mudaliar Rai Bahadur Arcot
 Narayanswamy, 293, 297
 Mudaliar, Srigaravelu, 305
 Mukerjee, Justice Anand, 132
 Mukherjee, Bhudeb, 233
 Mukherjee, Dr Ganga Prasad,
 159-160
 Mukherjee, Harish Chandra,
 189
 Mukherjee, Jagadananda, 189
 Mukherjee, Rangalal, 190
 Mukherjee, Sambhu, 391
 Mukherjee, Seetal Chandra,
 394-395
 Mukherjee, Sir Ashutosh, 159-
 160
 Mukhopadhyaya Nilamani, 157
 Muller, Max, 462, 532
 Mullik, Kumudranjan, 4
 Mullik, Nitto Lal, 223
 Mullik, Probodh Chander, 223
 Mussalmanpara Lane
 centre of social and religious
 revolt, 151-152
 Naba Kishore, 130-131
Nabavibhakar, the leading
 newspaper, 223
 Nag, Iswar Chandra, 130
 Nanak, Guru, 492
 Naoroji, Dadabhai, 391, 526-
 527, 536

- Narayana
 meaning, 234
 Nath, Sarada, 295
 National Fund, 327
 national songs, 190-193
 National Temperance
 Association of New York,
 542, 546
 Association of Scotland, 524-
 525
 National Theatre, 187, 228
 nationalism
 birth, 169
Navajeevana, The, 320, 323
 Nawab Nazim of
 Moorshidabad, 208
 Nayasharak School, 22-24
 Newman, Francis, 378
 Niranjana (author's son), 401
 Nityananda, 98, 493-494
 Norman, Chief Justice, 203
 Norris, Justice, 326-327
 Northbrook, Lord, 203-204, 253
 Nyayalankara Pandit Nilmani,
 167
 Nyayaratna Pandit Ramgati,
 180

 O'Kinealy, 119
 Orcott, Colonel, 319, 371, 373,
 406
 Om
 significance, 115
 Oriental University of Lahore,
 417
 Orissa
 Bengalee second language,
 271
 Brahmo Samaj, 272-273
 culture and literature, 268
 famine, 267
 floods, 267
 inter-provincial fusion, 271
 Jagannath temple, 269
 Lutheran movement, 269
 movement of Shree
 Chaitanya, 268-269
 Oriya language, 271
 part of Bengal
 administration, 266

 Pal, Hiranya, 3-4
 Pal, Bipinchandra, 303
 about father, 38-41
 about mother, 37
 address at student's weekly
 service of the Sadharan
 Brahmo Samaj, 442
 anecdote of school days, 26-
 29
 anecdote of student life in
 Calcutta, 149-151
 apprenticeship in Bengalee
 journalism, 262
 as a Brahmin not performing
 the last rites of his father,
 383-384
 assistant headmaster of the
 Habiganj High English
 School, 388
 association with Sadharana
 Brahmo Samaj, 252
 attitude towards Brahmo
 Samaj, 102
 austerity in life, 164, 284
 Bangalore experience, 298
 Bengali commentary of the
 Bhagvad Gita, 459-460

- Bengali poems writing, 132
- Bible reading, 454
- biography of Ram Charan Sen, 393
- birth, 3
- birth of second daughter, 336
- Brahmin cook, 34
- Calcutta Mess description, 144-146
- charges of rioting, 200
- cheaper living in Lahore, 440
- chickenpox attack, 166
- clearing father's debt, 389
- contest of election to the local board, 386-387
- daughter's birth, 442
- daughter's illness, 339
- death of first wife, 459
- differences with father, 168
- drifting away from Brahmo Samaj, 245
- Durga Puja participation, 91
- entrance examination, 134-135
- failure in F.A. examination, 168, 264-265
- failure to study Persian, 21-22
- family background, 4-8, 12-13
- father's death, 5, 165, 346
- father's illness, 344-345, 383
- father-son relations, 10-11, 246-251, 276-278, 287, 340
- financial position, 383
- first journey from Sylhet to Calcutta, 135-141
- first Madras visit in 1881, 292, 294
- first regular training in English journalism, 319
- from dualism to monism, 453
- gift of public speaking, 280
- gods and goddesses influence, 93-94
- handling money for personal expenses, 120
- hard life, 165, 250
- headmaster and English teacher in Cuttack, 168
- headmaster's job in Cuttack Academy, 264-265, 272, 290-294
- Hinduism faith, 98
- illness, 98-100, 289-290
- illness of children, 389
- incident memories, 7-9, 14-18, 31-32, 43-45
- incident with weekly worship of *Shani* or Saturn, 96-97
- indoor games, 42-43
- interest in sports, 26
- invitation from Bijay Krishna Goswami, 501-504
- joins Cathedral Mission College, 167-168
- librarian's post and secretary in Calcutta Public Library, 446-454
- literary ambition, 132-133
- London visit and experiences, 507-538
- losing faith in Hinduism, 98, 99, 102

- member of Brahmo Samaj, 225-227, 241, 248-249, 258, 277, 439, 452-461
- member of Sylhet Brahmo Samaj, 280
- missing first examination, 166-167
- Mohan Das clears his debts in Calcutta, 341
- mother's death, 162-163, 246
- mother's *shradd* ceremony, 166-167
- mourning ceremony of father, 384-385
- offers services as honorary worker in English school Sylhet, 275-276
- passing out entrance examination, 250
- polo playing, 10
- pranayama mantra* from Goswami, 502-503
- Presidency College, Calcutta, 135, 171, 418
- protest against Maharaja of Cooch Behar's marriage, 256-258
- Pyari Charan Sircar influence, 157
- reactor in Sylhet National School, 279
- reader of *Bhagavata Purana*, 98
- reasons for writings, 336
- religious discipline, 10
- resigns from the post of headmaster in Cuttack, 274-275
- resigns as sub-editor of the *Tribune*, 398-399, 416
- saddest period, 161-165
- sale of father's properties, 389
- Sanskrit *slokas* reading, 17
- scholarship holder in the Presidency College, 167
- schools education, 19-30
- speculation of God, 441, 453-454
- stealing sweets and edibles, 122
- struggle for more income, 336
- sub-editor of the *Bengal Public Opinion*, 326, 332
- sub-editor of the *Tribune*, 393-394
- swimming favourite support, 42-43
- Sylhet National School, 282-283
- textbooks in school, 25-26
- textbooks for the entrance examination, 29-30
- USA visit, 538-551
- wife's death, 445-446
- wife's family background, 341
- wife's illness, 343, 441-443
- will, 345-346
- Pal, Kristo Das, 414
- Pal, Navadvip, 144
- Pal, Ram Chandra, 4
- Palit, T., 223
- Pan-Islamic Movement, 315

- Pan-patra* ceremony, 127-128
 Panchadagee School, 404
 Pantalu, Butchita, 297, 304
 Paramahansa, Ramkrishna, 462-466, 469, 478
 Parasara, 82
Paridarshak, the weekly, 281-282, 287
 Parker, Theodore, 235, 318, 321, 377-378, 453
 Parry, 155
 Paul, St, 230, 462
 Peace of Berlin (1878), 205
People, English weekly, 394
 permanent settlement in Bengal, 311-312
 Persian
 court language, 123
 Peter the Great, 204
 physical education
 introduction, 198-199
Pitri-Paksha celebration, 70-71
 Plato, 532
 Ponsford, 111
 Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, 353
 Prabhu, Advaita Acharya, 470-471
prachar, 323
pranayama
 psycho-physical exercise, 502-503
 Prasad, Raja Siva Prasad, 411
 Presidency College, Calcutta (1874) reputation, 152-158, 167, 233
 prices of eatable commodities, 20
 primary education, 84-85
 Prince of Wales
 Calcutta visit, 166-167, 189, 209, 231
 Prinsep, 118
 Privy Council, 356
 Pryse, W., 23
Purana-path or reading of sacred books, 65-66
 Puranic Theory of Earthquakes rejection, 89
purdah
 removal, 296-297, 480-481
 Purdah Party, 189
 Punjab (Lahore) Brahmo Samaj, 394-401, 416
 Queen's proclamation of 1858, 207-208, 308
 Raghunathdas, Madhudas, 300-301
 Raha, 40
 railroad, 72
 Rajani Babu, 491
 Rajshahi Association, 220
 Ram, Lala Munshi, 431
Ramayana, The, 61, 526
 Ramdhan Mama, 45, 75
 Ramkrishna Paramhansa, 468-469, 478-479
 Ranade, Justice, 300, 404
 Ranjan, Ayotish, 305
 Ranjan, Satish, 305
 rationalism
 spirit, 196
 Ray, Raja Girish Chandra, 290
 Ray, Rakhal Chandra, 495, 497, 500

- Ray, Upadhyaya Gour
Govinda, 100-101
Regulation III of 1818, 202
Renan, 376-377
Reynolds, 118
Ripon, Lord, 302-303, 309-316,
317, 379
River Steam Navigation
Company, 18
Roshanlal, 397
Roy, Dr Prasanna Kumar, 150,
517
Roy, Gouri Sankar, 272
Roy, Govinda Chandra, 191
Roy, Janold Nath, 216
Roy, Jnanendra Lal, 324
Roy, Kali Narayan, 4-5
Roy, Kali Prasanna, 394
Roy, Kshirode Chandra, 273
Roy, Madhusudan, 273-274
Roy, Mrs Rajani Nath, 300-301
Roy Pandit Nabin Chandra,
396, 400, 416
Roy, Radhanath, 273-274
Roy, Rajani Nath, 150, 152, 284
Roy, Raja Ram Mohan, 100-110,
153, 222, 239, 258, 262, 322,
364, 375-377, 419-423, 457-
459, 461-463, 466, 470, 474,
507, 573
Roy, Sarat Chandra, 241-242
Roy, Umapada, 241
Rozio, Dr, 420
Russo-Turkish War, 207
Saadi
Persian poet, 470
Sadham Ashram Movement,
499
Sadhana, monthly journal, 324
Sadhana Ashram, 498-499
Sadharan Brahmo Samaj,
(1878), 256-261, 289, 292,
303, 317-319, 389, 396, 400-
401, 414, 463, 480, 482-483,
489, 497-498, 539
Alochana monthly journal,
323-324
establishment of, 244, 252
financial problem, 263
need of workers, 262-263
organs, 261-262
student's weekly service,
442-443
Sadharanee newspaper, 223
Samaj Darpan, The, 211, 213
Samadarshee, The Bengali
monthly, 242, 482
Sanjibancee, 325, 336
Sankara Charyas, 352
Sanskrit, 122-123
Sanskrit dramas, 186
Sanyal, Kali
Narayan, 281
Sanyal, Trailokya Nath, 377
Sarasvatee Puja, 59-60
Sarasvatee, Rama Bai, 284-286
Saraswati, Swami Dayanand
role, 364, 367-370, 379, 422-
432
Sarkar, Akshay Chandra, 169-
170, 206, 320-332, 391
Sarkar, Dr Mahendra Lal, 447
Sarkar, Hem Chandra, 508
Sarkar, Madhu Sudan, 400
Sarma, Loknath, 111
Sarson, 209
Satyarth Prakash, 370, 424, 427
Scot, Sir Walter, 170

- Seetala Kanta, 398
 Seetavaldee Native, 220
 Sen, Ambica Charan, 179-180
 Sen, Brajendra Nath, 265, 275, 278, 281
 Sen, Chandi Charan, 414
 Sen, Deenanath, 20
 Sen, Dr Dinesh Chandra, 351
 Sen, Guruprasad, 403
 Sen, Kenja Behari, 58, 461
 Sen, Keshub Chandra, 100-101, 103, 151-152, 171, 174-177, 182, 196, 215-227, 230, 233, 235-240, 244, 252, 254-255, 259, 261-262, 273, 283, 289, 292, 294, 318, 333, 353-357, 361-365, 376, 378, 394, 401, 412, 445-448, 455-458, 463, 469, 474, 481, 483, 499, 507-508, 540-541
 Sen, Nabakishore, 29, 33-35, 42, 124, 129
 Sen, Narendra Nath, 495
 Sen, Navaladhore, 277-279
 Sen, Paresh Nath, 323
 Sen, Pramada Charan, 393-394
 Sen, Pramatha Lal, 512
 Sen, Rai Saheb
 Nabkishore, 20-22
 Sen, Reshub Chandra, 416
 Sen, Shree Krishna Prasanna, 331-334
 Senhati People's Association, 220
 Sepoy Mutinity, 22-23, 204, 208, 221, 349-352, 360
 Seraj-ul-Islam, Maulavi, 447
 Sevaram, 397
 Shaha Jalal's shrine, 66
 Shahas, 49-50
 Shakespeare, 235
 study, 159
 Shakti cult
 philosophy, 41, 57, 464-465, 469, 478
 Sharma, Charanjeet, 376
 Sharma, Nabin Chandra, 145, 147, 280
 Shastri, Pandit
 Haraprasad, 352
 Shastri, Pandit Shivnath, 201, 232-237, 240-242, 244-247, 249, 260-264, 285, 292-294, 297, 299-301, 303, 318-319, 324-325, 341, 445, 458, 481-483, 507
 Sheikh Ghat Missionary School, 24-27
 Shome, Jay Govinda, 23-24, 200, 275
 Shome, Nabin Chandra, 101
 Shormani, Lobaran, 26
 Shree Krishna with Shree
 Radha *Leela* festival, 52, 61-63
 Sikh movement, 180-181
 Singh, Miss Leela, 397
 Singh, Raja Gambheer, 53
 Singh, Ranjit, 180
 Sinha, Birendra, 170
 Sircar, Dr Nilratan, 441
 Sircar, Pyaree Charan, 25, 156-157, 167, 235
 slavery, 12-13, 75

- Social Reform Movement in
Bombay, 301
- Social Reforme*, the weekly
Sheet, 435
- Somprakas*
Bengali Weekly, 117, 214, 223,
233
- Spencer, Herbert, 175, 536
- Sreehatti Prakash*, The, 231-232
- Statute Book, 313
- Statutory Civil Service, 178-179,
365-366
- Sukul, Jali Sankar, 241-242, 263,
336
- Sunderland, Dr S.T., 508
- Surendra Nath Case
open hostility of the British
bureaucracy and press
role, 112-119
- Sutcliffe
Principal of the Presidency
College, 153-157, 167
- Sutherland, 111-113, 118
- Swadeshi Case, 231-232
- Sylhet
administration, 104-108
Bhadralok classes, 78
Brahmo Samaj activities, 101,
225, 280, 282-287
dairy farm, 76
English High School
opening, 275
English officials, 109-110
Jayamata Hill, 73
Moslem population, 66-69, 81
murder cases and
administration role, 108-
109
- National School, 282-287
river, 73
- Sylhet Union
objective, 275
recognition, 275
- Tagore, Jyotindra Nath, 198,
227
- Tagore, Maharishi Devendra
Nath, 102, 176, 194, 198,
223, 259, 273, 324, 353, 376,
378, 398, 418-422, 464-463,
469-470, 474-477, 479, 500
- Tagore, Prasanna Kumar, 345
- Tagore, Salyendra Nath, 117
- Tantric cult, 478
- tapasya*
father's performance, 249
- Taralankar, Madan Mohan, 25
- Tarkachodamari, Pandit
Shashadhar, 320, 322, 331-
334
- Tattvabhusan, Pandit Sita Nath,
101, 459, 461
- Tuttwa-Bodhinee*, 262
- Tattwa-Kaumudee*, Bengali
fortnightly, 261
- Tawney, 154
- Taylor, 156
- tea gardens in Assam,
starting, 35
- tea labour condition in Assam,
413-414
- Thakur, Shreepada Babaji, 285-
286
- Thakurata Monoranjan Guha,
492, 500

- Theosophical Movement, 374-375, 379, 406
 Theosophical Society, 303, 320, 367, 375, 407
 Tilak, Bal Gangadhar, 392
 Travers, 514, 517
 Treaty of Berlin, 205
Tribune, The, 394-395, 402, 440
 Tyabji, Baraduddin, 405
- Unitarian movement, 518
 untouchability, 78-80, 504
Upanishads, The, 15, 195-196
 Upton, Dr, 513-514
- Vaishnava festivals, 52-54, 83
 Vaishnava lyrics, 186
 Vaishnavic cult and culture, 11, 57, 181, 466, 469
 Vaishnava temple, 82
 Vaishnava worship, 52
 Vaishnavic movement in Bengal, 181
 Vaishnavic scripture, 84
 Vaishnavism, 182
 Vassey, 209
Vedas, The, 15
 Vernacular Act, Press Act agitation, 206, 219-224
 Victoria, Queen, 206-207
- Vidyabagish, Ram Chandra, 169-170
 Vidyabhusan, Dwarkanath, 233
 Vidyaratna, Pandit Ramkumar, 261, 413-415
 Vidyasagar, Pandit Ishwar Chandra, 14, 25, 130, 153, 158, 169, 173, 177-178, 273, 332, 337, 376
 Vidyavageesh, Ram Chandra, 419
 Vissendas, 401
 Vivekananda, Swami, 462, 470, 539-543
- Wahabi case, 119, 221
 Wahabi movement, 2022-03
 Wahabi trial, 204
 Wedderburn, Sir William, 435, 536
 widow remarriage, 253, 301
 Widow Remarriage Act, 14
 Wise, 4
 Wood, Sir John, 115-116
 worship of planets, 96
- Yatkinchet Jalayog, 227
 Young Itlay Movement, 177, 182-184
 Yule, Andrew, 411

